



THE MEDIEVAL HAGGADAH

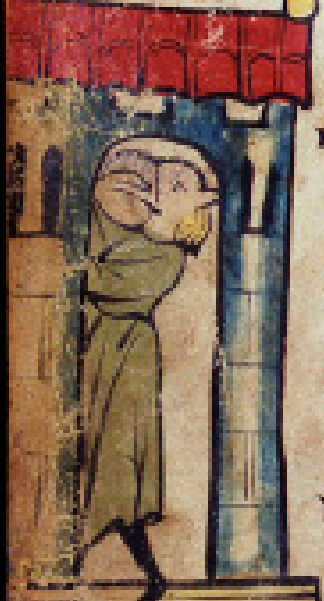
Art, Narrative & Religious Imagination

Marc Michael Epstein

THE MEDIEVAL HAGGADAH



הנה האלך אתו בכל
 ארץ מצרים וארצה אתו
 ואתו לו את יעקב ואתו
 ואתו את יעקב ואתו
 ואתו לעשו אתה שיעור
 לרשת אותו ויעקב ובניו
 ירדו מצרים



ברוך שומר הבטוחות
 של ישראל ברוך
 הוא שהקנה מחשב את
 הקו לעשות במה שאמו
 לאברהם אבינו פריתרון



THE MEDIEVAL HAGGADAH

Art, Narrative, and Religious Imagination

Marc Michael Epstein

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Frontispiece: Jacob and Esau,
Joseph in Egypt, and Jacob and
sons descending to Egypt. Birds'
Head Haggadah, South Germany
(Mainz?), c. 1300, fol. 12r

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For Ági
בחירת ליבי
אהבת נפשי
מאור חי

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Acknowledgments

THE PRODUCTION OF medieval manuscripts was an intensely collaborative process, and the creation of this volume about medieval manuscripts no less so. I imagine that the artists of the works I explore herein learned a great deal from the patrons and rabbinic advisers with whom they collaborated. I understand this well, since although Vassar College, where much of this book was composed, is renowned as a teaching institution, for me it has been primarily and consistently a learning institution. Many of the questions raised in this book initially arose in conversation with the remarkable students I have encountered over the years in my “Religion and the Arts” course and my “Jews and Art” seminar. This book would never have been completed without the exceptional editorial skills of my research assistants, Gilad Thaler, Leah Varsano, and Samuel Rausnitz, who challenged my grammatical choices and urged me to sharpen my arguments through many drafts. The Jewish Studies academic intern, Elizabeth London, and the program intern, Rakhel Shapiro, were also tremendously helpful in dealing with the extensive bibliographical needs of my research. All were available, efficient, and cheerful. They not only lightened my burden, they engaged me throughout the process of preparing the manuscript. My thanks also to Wendy Post, Trish Mathis, Betty-Lou Cifone, Jolyn Guerriero, Tamar Thibodeau, Pete Conklin, Greg Deichler, and Brian Chickery, who were always there when I required administrative and technical assistance.

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volumes in their expert care made me feel immediately at home, among colleagues who love these books as much as I do.

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The influence of my parents as my teachers of reading—both of texts and of images—is found on each page of this volume, and I am humbled by and grateful for it. Equally present is the inspiration of each of my children. Misha's observation about Datan and Aviram unlocked the entire Birds' Head Haggadah for me. Shevi's close reading of the plague of frogs in the Golden Haggadah highlighted for me the playfulness of the authorship of that manuscript and of the willingness of that authorship to go beyond both scripture and rabbinic exegesis into the realm of personal commentary. Gabi's many meticulous observations of nature extends to his wonderful analysis of the *havdalah* scene in the Birds' Head Haggadah, and urges me to look ever closer at everything that lies before me—on the page and in the world. This book is, in a sense, theirs, as seeing through their eyes teaches me to look afresh.

Ági, my wife, has been the best and most true of intellectual companions. I have been over this material so much with her and benefited so profoundly both from her insights and from her generosity with her time and attention that it is no exaggeration to say that the book owes to her its life force. As do I, myself, for she has been a constant solace, support, joy, and inspiration: my love and my muse, illuminator of the pages of the life we author together.

To all these, then, my deep appreciation for the good they have done and continue to do. To me is left only to take responsibility for those things that are my own: errors, inaccuracies, and omissions among them.

A Note on the Manuscripts

SOME TRADITIONAL DESIGNATIONS for naming of the manuscripts discussed in this book are maintained, and others have been modified.

“Birds’ Head Haggadah”: Jerusalem, Israel Museum, MS 180/57, South Germany (Mainz?), c. 1300, so named because the heads of the composite creatures depicted display birdlike features.

“Golden Haggadah”: London, British Library, Add. MS Catalonia, 27210, c. 1320–1330, so named because the splendor of its golden backgrounds makes this an appropriate designation.

“Rylands Haggadah”: Manchester, John Rylands Library, Catalonia, c. 1330–1340, MS Heb. 6.

“BL Or. 1404”: London, British Library, Or. 1404, Catalonia, c. 1330–1340, generally designated the “Brother Haggadah,” relative to Rylands Heb. 6, an inaccurate designation.



Introduction

Jewish Visual Culture as Memory's Mirror

MORE THAN TWO DECADES AGO, when I had the pleasure of living in Jerusalem for the first time, I was invited by friends to an intimate presentation of what they promised would be an extraordinary work of art. Having crossed town on foot before the buses started running on a Saturday evening, I was shown into a small but tidy basement studio and introduced to the artist David Moss, who proceeded to lay open folios of a haggadah—a manuscript of the home service for the eve of Passover—that he was in the process of illuminating for an American patron. What impressed me most about the manuscript were its intellectual energy and complexity and the extremely considered way in which it had been assembled. The primary fascination of the illuminations lay in how each could be “read” as a text, in a learned and often witty internal dialectic with the ancient words of the haggadah itself.

Studying what is often called “text illustration,” one occasionally experiences “eureka” moments when word and image come together to say something significantly more than each might have expressed on its own. I will never forget my delight in opening the pages on which appeared the text of *Mishnah Pesahim* 10:5: “In each and every generation one is obligated to view himself as if he had come out of Egypt.”¹ This is the haggadah’s commandment of engagement and reenactment; it is one of the pillars of what the historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi famously dubbed “Jewish collective memory.”² The text admonishes Jews that it is not sufficient merely to recount the Exodus as history on Passover. To have truly fulfilled their religious obligation, Jews must put themselves in the very shoes of those who hastily traversed the borders of the Land of Egypt on the night of the Exodus, fleeing the bondage of Egypt’s Pharaoh for the service of Sinai’s God.

Though the words themselves are an eloquent exposition of the commandment of engaged memory, this illustration made it speak to me as it never had before (fig. 1). The right side of the open bifolium featured a series of highly individualized heads in roundels—those of Jewish men—young and old, Eastern and Western, from every conceivable time period and in every historical manner of dress. These images were adopted from a variety of monuments of Jewish visual culture, familiar and obscure. Each roundel was flanked by others: these were not decorated with images but inlaid with tiny Mylar mirrors. The left-hand page was similarly constructed, but here were portraits of women. The roundels with the portrait heads and the mirrors alternated in a reverse pattern on

PLATE 1

Tabernacle as *Logos*. Opening folio of the book of Numbers. London, British Library (BL) Add. MS 15282, *Duke of Sussex's German Pentateuch*, South German, c. 1300, fol. 179v



FIGURE 1
 “In each and every generation . . .”
 Moss Haggadah, collection of Richard
 and Beatrice Levy, Florida, fols. 28b
 and 29a. From *The Moss Haggadah: A complete reproduction of the haggadah*. Written and illuminated by David Moss for Richard and Beatrice Levy, with the commentary of the artist. Rochester, N.Y., 1990

the opposite folios, so that as one opened the book, the figures on each side of the page would “view themselves” in these mirrors, and the user of the haggadah, peering down at the opened page, would see his or her own face reflected in the whole.³

Those pages struck me as a powerful metaphor for the function of visual culture as a mirror into which Jews might project themselves and in which they might view themselves as actors in history, both presenting themselves via visibility and understanding themselves in its reflection.⁴

One expects the work of a twentieth-century Jewish artist to deal with themes of identity. But until recently, however, the idea that medieval Jews might have imagined themselves in a particular way or viewed themselves reflected in art they created or commissioned would have seemed farfetched. Medieval Jewish visual culture has long been presented as simply illustrative of texts and as merely imitative of models. Jewish iconography in the Middle Ages was understood to narrate scripture or to illustrate liturgy. Scholarly interest lay in how well or poorly it did so, whether it incorporated “midrashic” (legendary) details, and to what extent it reflected “ancient Jewish models now lost.” But in the past decade or so, as the historiography of medieval Jewish visual culture has shaken itself awake from the dream of recension theory, researchers have

taken up the idea that in visualizing and dramatizing scripture or liturgy, medieval Jewish visual culture also reflected the identities of its authorship in subtle and affecting ways.

This book engages the iconography illustrating the text of the haggadah, which incorporates and transforms the biblical Exodus narrative. Used at the seder, the ritual meal and home service of Passover, the haggadah is designed to stimulate the enactment of one of the most famous of all collective memory metanarratives, *sippur yezi' at Mizrayim*—the narration of the Exodus from Egypt. This is a variable, ritual oral performance containing both set and spontaneous elements that Jews are mandated to create anew each year. As they do so, they weave into it new insights and perspectives with a deep and abiding connection to every seder that has gone before in what literary theorists call an “inter-textual” manner. Illuminated haggadot add a further level of nuance and sophistication to the ritual. Their “interpictoriality” (to use the phrase coined by art historian Cynthia Hahn) makes the seder a true *Gesamtkunstwerk*: these magnificent books do not merely illustrate the received haggadah text or the biblical Exodus narrative, but—in concert with those laconic texts and in combination with remembered elements from other texts and previous “performances” of the haggadah—through the images they contain, help to generate the metanarrative of *sippur yezi' at Mizrayim*.⁵

FOUR HAGGADOT

I will explore four significant illuminated haggadot: one from Ashkenaz (the region encompassing present-day France and Germany) and three from Sepharad (what is now Spain), via an analysis of their iconography and against the backdrop of what it is possible to know of their history. I have chosen to concentrate on manuscripts from the early fourteenth century, as this was a crucial historical moment for the development of Jewish visual culture. Jews in late antiquity evinced a lively engagement with the visual, but their practices appear to have fallen dormant around the seventh century, perhaps because of the dominance of Islam in the regions in which the majority of Jews dwelt. During the early thirteenth century, by which time Jewish settlement had spread throughout Christendom, Jews in both Ashkenaz and Sepharad developed a renewed interest in narrative painting coterminous with the emergence of Christian narrative art from monastic contexts into urban workshops. By the early fourteenth century, narrative, figurative art in Jewish culture had reemerged and reached its most articulated development. The manuscripts I will examine are products of that renaissance.⁶

In the first section I examine the Birds' Head Haggadah (Jerusalem, Israel Museum, MS 180/57, South Germany [Mainz?], c. 1300), the earliest known surviving illuminated haggadah, and a work in which many of the faces on the human figures depicted throughout the manuscript are replaced with those of bird-animal hybrids. In the

second section I focus on a Spanish manuscript, the Golden Haggadah (London, British Library, MS Add. 27210, Catalonia, c. 1320–1330), the iconography of which has long attracted attention because it seems so indisputably “formed in the image and likeness” of illuminated Christian manuscripts of its period and place. In the final unit I compare two “siblings,” the Rylands Haggadah (Manchester, John Rylands University Library, MS Heb. 6, Catalonia, c. 1330–1340) and its so-called Brother (London, British Library, MS Or. 1404, Catalonia, c. 1330–1340). These works have been paired because of similarities in their iconography and style, and previous research has attempted to determine which sibling derived from which.

Throughout, I propose new solutions to long-unresolved questions concerning the meaning of the iconography of these important manuscripts. But I also employ iconographic analysis as a springboard from which to address broader issues in the study of medieval Jewish thought, visuality, and culture, both material and intellectual.

In the chapters on the Birds’ Head Haggadah I engage the relationship between piety and halakhic (legal) expediency; various aspects of Jewish-Christian relations; questions concerning internal perceptions of Jewishness and social stratification; and issues of temporality and eschatology in medieval Ashkenaz.

In the chapters on the Golden Haggadah I examine how Jewishness was played out in a medieval Sephardic culture that was highly aesthetically acculturated. I demonstrate how sacred history was constructed via iconography and how images were read as text. I consider the ways in which female patrons or giftees may have directed or inspired iconography, and the manner in which female audiences and book owners may have related to such images.

Finally, in the chapters on the Or. 1404 and the Rylands Haggadah, I explore problems of recension and reproduction. I ponder what it means for iconographical units and entire picture cycles to be “rather like” one another, addressing issues of the subtle variation in the “tone” of messages transmitted by apparently identical iconography.⁷ I address questions of whose eyes are doing the looking, what they apprehend and what they miss.

ILLUSTRATION AS “TEXT,” ICONOGRAPHY AS EXEGESIS: THE STATE OF RESEARCH

The past two decades have witnessed a revolution in scholarly understanding of majority-minority relations in the Middle Ages. Historians have persuasively argued that Jews “co-owned” the culture that they shared with Christians. They have demonstrated that although Jews may have been subject to the exponents of medieval civilization, they should not be regarded as having been slaves to it.⁸ Like considerations of medieval

history, the study of medieval manuscript illumination has also been transformed. Researchers have increasingly contextualized medieval manuscripts within the realms of material culture—patronage, production, and reception—and against the backdrop of contemporary intellectual developments: social and political thought, exegesis, theology, and eschatology.⁹

My previous work, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (1997), was published in the wake of the earlier of these studies of medieval Jewish-Christian relations and of medieval manuscripts, and in the midst of the lively intellectual climate that would birth the more recent ones. In it, I emphasized that in spite of the superficial similarities between medieval Jewish and Christian visual culture, medieval Jews owned their artistic culture in depth and at the core. Manuscripts were illuminated for Jewish audiences by Jews or non-Jews under explicit direction from Jewish patrons. Such patrons would, at minimum, have possessed a basic working knowledge of texts and commentaries; some of them may have been considerably more learned, or may have depended upon rabbinic advisers.

I demonstrated how Jews engaged in a negotiation of visual traditions in a manner akin to their other modes of cultural intercourse with the wider society. On the one hand, medieval civilization, though strongly colored by the Christian religious experience, was also their civilization, and they strove for a degree of assimilation. On the other hand, they were wary of their indigenous traditions being swallowed up by the very cultural externals they adopted. This wariness moved them to ensure that, below the surface of their cultural emulation, the internal content was reflective of their own agenda, frequently proudly and defiantly so. Often, I argued, this emulation was accomplished in a fashion that reflected the mores of the majority population in new ways, sometimes in a manner that subverted them.

In the field of the historiography of Jewish visual culture, *Dreams of Subversion* was fairly lonely on the shelves. The years since it appeared have seen a small but significant number of works situating Jewish visual culture within the wider panoply of cultural studies: first, some reassessments of Jewish visual culture in early modernity and modernity, and, more recently, reconsiderations of medieval Jewish iconography on the part of researchers who, like myself, have been influenced by the reassessment of Jewish-Christian relations in the Middle Ages and by current agendas in the study of medieval art.¹⁰

Looking back at *Dreams of Subversion* through the lens of this recent scholarship, I would add that it was precisely through the ease they felt in adopting, adapting, reframing, and subverting the conventions of the general culture that Jews confirmed their covenant with that culture. These interpretive movements constituted the means by

which they made the culture belong to them, even as they belonged to it, despite the tensions sometimes caused by their social and political interactions with Christians. Likewise, Christians understood Jews to be an intrinsic feature of their wider sociocultural landscape regardless of underlying theological misgivings and of the social tensions the presence of nonbelievers in a theocratic Christian society could produce.

Like *Dreams of Subversion*, the present work owes much to the New Philology and the New Medievalism, and, of course, to the *histoire des mentalités* of the *Annales* school. It both draws from and builds on approaches to the history of art from the 1980s through the present, including what has been called the New Art History, its influences ranging from the narratological approaches of Richard Brilliant and his students to the reception theory of Michael Camille (who writes on the assimilation and perception of images by medieval people) and that of Suzanne Lewis (who portrays iconography as actually constituting “text,” rather than transmitting or translating it). I am deeply indebted to the sort of close readings and incisive contextualizations provided by Joseph Leo Koerner in his works on visual culture in the early modern period. Koerner employs a micro-contextual method in the examination of Bosch, Breugel, Reformation painting, and German self-portraits, limning in an ingenious manner specific moments in the life of works of art and framing them as convergences between intellectual and social history.¹¹

I aspire to a similar mode of analysis to the four haggadot under consideration here. Each haggadah I examine embodies a unique intellectual microcontext, generated by the relationship between the written text, the larger metanarrative, and the iconography. This is because each is the result of the work of a particular “authorship,” a collaboration between Jewish patrons who sponsored and conceptualized the manuscript (in some cases, it seems, with the aid of rabbinic advisers), and artists (Jewish or non-Jewish) who executed the commission. The authorship of each haggadah transmitted a particular ideological, theological, philosophical, historiosophical, political, and social agenda, a way of telling the tale of the relationship of Jews with God, their neighbors, and each other through their exegesis of the narratives of sacred scripture. These agendas were mediated via successive strata of intention and perception in the creation of each work: First, in the planning of each manuscript, the authorship emphasized (either subtly or explicitly) those aspects of the narrative that highlight the agenda it wished to convey, clothing these ideas in visual language. Then, these concepts were transmitted through the interpretation of their commission by the designers and executors of each work. Ultimately, the images and their motivating ideas were received and reinterpreted by the various audiences of each manuscript over time.

Each authorship invented motifs, used iconography common to both Jewish and Christian culture, and borrowed and adapted iconography that was indigenously Christian. In cases where common or Christian iconography was used, the authorship made

concerted choices about which version of a particular iconography to employ and about how to adapt it based on some aspect of the immediate contemporary Jewish intellectual microcontext or, often, in response to the religious norms and exegetical interpretations of Christian society. In each case, the resulting iconography embodies a view of the world as it was constructed by a given authorship. The traces of the reception of that iconography—captions, graphic supplementation or enhancement, and erasures—represent the world-views of successive layers of its audiences, from the particular household for which a given manuscript was created to the generations that engaged with it throughout the centuries of its use—readers in a chain of reception in which present-day viewers are the most recent link.

Because they involve individual creators and readers, questions of intention and reception are ultimately and essentially relational, contingent, and subjective. Some of the original intentions continue to shine through fairly explicitly. Others have faded with time. Like readers of the haggadah text, each and every generation of viewers of these illuminated “commentaries” engages in a dual process of attempting to reconstruct the intent of the original authorship and of reconceptualizing the meaning of the iconography for its particular present.¹²

TRACES OF INTENTION

In what follows, I attempt to apprehend traces of the intentions of the authorships that conceived, designed, and created the four haggadot on which I focus. Correspondingly, I also conjecture regarding the reactions of various strata of receptive audiences, examining later captions and graphic emendations as well as the iconographic conjunction and disjunction of particular manuscripts with other contemporary examples, in order to ascertain some possible perceptions of these works by their original and subsequent viewers.

But much as I desire to do this with precision, the absence of any extensive information concerning the authorship or provenance of these haggadot presents a hurdle: Lacking colophons and other evidence of specific provenance, I can speak only in as informed a manner as possible about, say, “Barcelona circa 1320” or “Ashkenaz (possibly Mainz) around 1300.” But, of course, Barcelona in 1320 was not Barcelona in 1325, and Mainz in 1300 was not Speyer in 1300. The shift in the cultural moment between one year and the next, or in the localization of a given work to one town or another, has the potential to alter iconographic readings, closing down some possibilities for interpretation and opening up others, so that all readings must be contingent and pending revisions should further provenance information come to light.

My analysis is further complicated by the paucity of documentary evidence for the authorships of these works. In no case do I know who the patrons were, though I assume

that they were Jewish and wealthy. Nor do I know who the artists were. Nor, finally, do I have any documentation of communication between artists and patrons, so the balance between the involvement of the patrons and their advisers and that of the artists, as well as the relationship between artists and scribes, remains unknown.¹³

But even if I had precise and accurate information regarding the provenance of each manuscript there would always be specific circumstances surrounding each work's creation that are lost to history.¹⁴ The question, then, is how far to venture in reconstructing intellectual microcontexts. Absent much concrete historical information I see no choice but to read the available information—that is, the iconography itself—as deeply as possible, and to speculate in responsible ways concerning both authorial intentions and the reception of the iconography by various successive audiences. The alternative to conscientious speculation is silence regarding many potentially interesting interpretive possibilities—a situation that I have described as one of interpretive paralysis: One can be beautifully precise in pinpointing the transmission of particular motifs from antique pagan sources through Christian iconography and into a medieval Jewish context. But such work is ultimately disappointing if, owing to a lack of sufficient “concrete” information on which to base a historical claim, scholars feel they should not—they cannot—engage imaginatively with questions of why the iconography was adopted, how it was adapted, and what it would have *meant* for a Jewish authorship or for Jewish audiences throughout the centuries.¹⁵

RESEARCH PREMISES

So I will speculate, but in order to assure the plausibility of my speculations, my work will be grounded in a set of three cardinal premises—premises based on the findings of the new manuscript studies, set against the backdrop of the revised narrative of the medieval Jewish-Christian relationship, and adopting some of the art historical approaches mentioned above, applied alongside the conclusions of *Dreams of Subversion* and other more recent work on medieval Jewish visual culture.

First, I will assume that the sequence and disposition of the iconography in all four manuscripts under consideration is both coherent and intentional. I will cultivate humility in the face of iconography that seems to be erroneous or misplaced, asking what the authorship might have understood about it that I do not.

Second, rather than presenting “solutions” to iconographic “problems,” I will demonstrate how to construct possible constellations of plausible meaning for the iconography. I will offer interpretations of the iconography grounded in the minimum of basic knowledge of Jewish texts that can be assumed of the authorship of these manuscripts.

Finally, I will recognize the importance of midrashic *mentalités*—with their inherent

acceptance of interpretive polyvalency—for the understanding of the iconography of the fourteenth-century works I discuss.

COHERENCE AND INTENTIONALITY

This study is contingent on an assumption of the meaningfulness of the iconography inscribed in all the haggadot I examine. It is a vote of confidence, as it were, in the intellectual acuity and integrity of their authorships. I believe that all the elements of the iconographic program of each of the haggadot must originally have made sense to the authorship. Each element was expressly designed to relate to every other, and there were particular agendas behind the creation or adaptation and the arrangement of the individual motifs—even if those arrangements and agendas are unclear at this historical distance.

Current research into the construction of medieval manuscripts has demonstrated that their planners and creators—both Jewish and Christian—were powerfully aware of the relationship between text and image. Whether they created iconography or adopted and adapted it from previous sources and traditions, they configured and emplaced it in a manner both intentional and self-conscious. Living as they did in an age before artists demonstrated self-awareness as “artists” and of the product they were producing as “art,” the authorship of these manuscripts, with their finely tuned sense of narratology, were more akin to exegetes, and their work is more comparable to commentary. They created images that could, by dint of accompanying sacred narratives, be assigned a status inherently parallel and analogous to those narratives. In the study of medieval Christian visual culture, iconography is no longer always expected to illustrate either text or commentary literally, but to *be* exegesis in and of itself, even serving, on occasion, as commentary that “reads against the grain”—responding to text in a deliberately counter-textual manner. There is every reason to read contemporary Jewish iconography in the same way—as a primary text.¹⁶

Because I respect the decisions of the authorship regarding the configuration and disposition of the iconography, I examine carefully any element in a given iconography that seems to me at first glance to be misplaced, erroneous, or out of sequence. Simply because something seems meaningless or corrupted to early twenty-first-century viewers doesn't mean that it was so for the original authorship. When iconography seems strange to me, it occasions me to attempt to understand how the authors understood it rather than assume that I must know better than they did. I do not fault the authorship for what I, as a twenty-first-century viewer, might fail to notice or understand concerning the structure or details of the iconography. But to have the best chance of apprehending the particular inner life of each manuscript, I examine each one as a holistic work, without

expectations concerning what narrative iconography in haggadot in general—or in these particular haggadot—“should” look like. I consider the illuminations first and foremost on their own terms: that is, with the disposition of iconography, in the context and in the sequence in which they are found in the manuscript at hand. I try to gain a bird’s-eye view of the configuration of the totality of each work, proceeding from the assumption that this configuration is intrinsic to the manuscript and deliberate on the part of the authorship. I then try to understand the potential connotations of this configuration, and to consider some of the various possible meanings that this particular iconography in this specific configuration might have had for the authorship and the original audience.

One way in which I attempt to keep myself from falling into preconceptions of how narrative iconography “should” be configured is to emulate contemporary researchers of medieval Christian visual culture in distancing myself from expectations of absolute narrative linearity—the idea that the illuminations should follow a trajectory designated strictly by their relationship to the text they illustrate. Because iconography is acknowledged to have a life of its own, it is understood that metatextual concerns may come into play in the invention and configuration (or the adoption and adaptation) of motifs.

The metatextuality of the haggadah narrative cues my expectation that the illuminations I examine will be configured metaiconographically rather than in a linear and consistent manner. My metaiconographic approach to the illuminations accords with the modes of narratological analysis employed in the current historiography of medieval art, particularly as it moves away from ideas of literalism and narrative linearity. A good parallel to my analysis of haggadah iconography appears in Dorothy Verkerk’s essay on the Ashburnham Pentateuch (Paris, Bibl. Nat. MS nouv. acq. lat. 2334 [Spain, North Africa, Syria, or Italy], late sixth or early seventh century). There she writes: “If the scenes [in the manuscript] are read in correct narrative order, it must be concluded that they are placed in an incoherent manner that jumps erratically around the folio. To decipher what the reasoning behind the placement and selection of illustrations may have been, it is necessary to abandon many personal assumptions.”¹⁷ She faults those who examined the manuscript before her with preconceived notions: “First, they look to a previous model for answers without considering the contemporaneous issues that may have shaped the codex: the function of the manuscript in large part determines its format. . . . Secondly, [these approaches are predicated upon the idea that there was] a textual, or written, structure defined by the biblical narratives. They assume that the chronological sequence of narrative determined the order of the scenes, and that illustration was subordinate to the written text.”¹⁸

Verkerk draws parallels between the descriptions of effective rhetoric in early medieval catechism guides and the manner in which the Ashburnham authorship employed iconography. She demonstrates how both Augustine and Chrysostom advise using

striking juxtapositions and combinations in sermons to potential converts in order to highlight moral lessons. In art, she argues, moral rhetoric may be intentionally communicated by the nonlinear (hence attention-grabbing) arrangement of the iconography. “The creators of this manuscript,” she concludes, “were remarkably adept in directing the viewer to the deeper meanings and morals to be found in the illustrations. In doing so, the illustrations function independently from the text. They tell different stories and are organized on different principles not bound by textual chronology. The Ashburnham Pentateuch challenges us to set aside preconceived notions of narrative structure and the relationship of image to text. The illuminations, by being bound within sacred scripture, occupy a privileged position from which they can appropriate the text, comment upon it, and, ultimately, reveal the truth within the text.”¹⁹

In what follows, I will argue consistently that the four haggadot under consideration here often contain iconography of great sophistication of conception and intentionality of organization. This should not be surprising. As Verkerk says of the Ashburnham Pentateuch, “I find it difficult to accept the underlying assumption that the makers of this manuscript resorted to merely decorative devices or were confined by a model when it came to selecting scenes from a larger cycle and then arranging those scenes on a folio. They could create complex iconographical meanings . . . [the] simple insertion [of a seemingly insignificant detail] profoundly changes the text’s meaning. The illustrations show a complex, imaginative, and rich pictorial iconography that does not hesitate to invent by incorporating contemporary imagery. The sophistication of this iconography argues . . . for a more profound structure [and for] . . . more than a decorative or haphazard approach.”²⁰

INTERPRETATION: CONSTELLATIONS OF POSSIBILITY

I write with complete awareness that what will result from my readings are neither the only nor the “correct” interpretations. First of all, as Michael Camille has demonstrated, iconography “need not have one univocal meaning or one single text that explains it. Rather, it is crucial in propaganda that it have enough breadth of reference to be read by diverse groups in society.”²¹ Moreover, the illuminations I will examine are at least as complex and imaginative as those in the Ashburnham Pentateuch, evincing a similarly “profound structure” and an unhesitating tendency to invent. Thus, they deserve interpretations as creative and open-minded as those Verkerk proposes in the case of that manuscript. Finally, being Jewish works of the fourteenth century, they emerge from an intellectual context imbued with midrashic *mentalités* in which a polyvocality of interpretation was completely inherent, so it would be anachronistic to present absolute interpretations for the iconography when its inventors themselves would likely have been open to a variety of possibilities.

Accordingly, rather than proposing immutably “true” readings and “watertight” solutions to iconographic “problems,” I demonstrate how to construct possible constellations of plausible meaning for discrete iconographic motifs and larger iconographic schema both by reflecting upon the broader context of the manuscript in which they appear and by attempting to understand the particular inner life of each work itself. With the caveat, again, that I have little concrete provenance information about these manuscripts, I can at least ascribe them to a particular part of a given century and to a region or city. By the “broader context” I mean to include the general social and intellectual currents in both the Jewish and the wider world of the manuscript’s approximate milieu, and, of course, the aesthetic and iconographic environment in which it was created.

When I speak of the “inner life” of a given manuscript, I mean the particular ideological, theological, philosophical, historiosophical, political, or social concerns of the authorship of the manuscript insofar as they can be titrated from the totality of the iconographic program in which a given illustration appears. Each manuscript has its unique manner of creating exegesis by filtering the iconographic elements it borrows, copies, and adapts through its specific indigenous, contemporary world-view. The patrons and audiences of medieval Jewish visual culture were, after all, traditional diaspora Jews steeped in the texts and practices of their historical moment. By interrogating the iconography they produced *as exegesis*, I hope to bring the inner life of these beautiful books—and of the people for whom they were created—into sharper focus. I will seek to determine “how [these] visual narratives mean.”²²

MIDRASHIC MENTALITÉS

The study of haggadah iconography necessitates a retreat to some degree from the academic construction of midrash as a literary genre and a parallel move toward the embrace of midrash as a way of understanding the world. This should be done in order to enter as fully as possible into the consciousness of the authorship and premodern audiences of these works, just as scholars of medieval Christian iconography attempt to adopt the position of the medieval viewer as much as is feasible. Cynthia Hahn writes: “Admittedly there is no hope of recovering the full range of visual reference that may have come into play in the act of medieval ‘viewing,’ since too much has been lost of that visual world, and too little is known of that viewing... [but] to recapture some of these interactions, it is necessary to readjust our viewpoint to mimic the more engaged perspective of medieval viewers.”²³ I certainly do not advocate blurring the line between scripture, midrash, and metanarrative in critical or philological studies. But just as Hahn endorses an attempt to recapture the position of the medieval viewer by adopting an inter pictorial, typological mindset, I believe a foray into Jewish visuality in the early

fourteenth century will perforce involve delving into midrashic *mentalités* in which scripture was both ultimately true and infinitely expansive and malleable (providing it was bent in the direction that the rabbis wanted it to go). Recapturing such a traditional perspective via both the midrashic corpus as studied in the fourteenth century and the *parshanut* (exegesis) of that era will enable me to apprehend crucial details that will help provide clues to some of the long-troubling apparent inconsistencies in the sequence and iconography of the four haggadot I examine.

When I speak of distinctive intellectual contexts, of the inner life of the manuscript, or of the texts and practices of its authorship and its audience, I am not assuming a body of esoteric knowledge and a secret language revealed only to the initiated or apprehendable only by the highly imaginative. I have striven for the broadest possible readings, avoiding connections that are abstruse or obscure, or that might have involved application to texts or ideas it is difficult to associate with each particular authorship.²⁴ Although the textual-iconographic connections proposed in the following chapters may seem novel to the postmodern reader, for medieval audiences they would have been (for the most part) obvious rather than learned, simple rather than complex. No exegetical connection or interpretation I propose should require any more than a basic medieval Jewish curriculum—*Humash* (the Pentateuch) with *pshat* (contextual/philological) or *drash* (midrashic legendary/homiletic) exegesis. Because the proposed meanings would have been accessible to Jewish society at nearly every level of learning within medieval Ashkenazic and Sephardic cultures, it is my hope that these meanings will be credible to the reader.

Finally, throughout this analysis, I will strive always to be conscious of how the books I examine were used. I do not say “how they were read,” for the seder liturgy demands active, performative participation rather than passive scanning of the haggadah text. As I have noted, the biblical commandment “You shall tell your child [about the Exodus] on that day” was interpreted by the rabbis to mean that “in each and every generation, one is required to view oneself (*li’ot et atsmo*) as if one had personally come forth from Egypt.” Maimonides (R. Moses B. Maimon, Cordoba, Spain, 1135–Egypt, 1204) famously emphasizes the reflexive or dramatizing aspect of this admonition in quoting another version of the Mishnah: “In every generation,” his version reads, “one is obligated *lehar’ot et atsmo*—to show oneself [or to put it in the postmodern terms which Maimonides anticipates, “to perform one’s Self”], as if one had personally come forth—just now—from the slavery of Egypt.”

The medieval haggadah served as something between the script and the backdrop for the liturgical and ritual actions of Passover eve. Though it contains literary elements, it was not merely read like a book. Though it is certainly liturgical in nature, it was not

simply prayed like most liturgy. Though it encompasses texts from mishnah, gemara, and midrash, it was not just studied like other rabbinic texts. And although at times it provides the script for ritual and liturgical events in a complex traditional order, it was not fully performed with set dialogue, costumes, entrances and exits.

It is perhaps most accurate to say that the haggadah was not acted but rather enacted, with some features—such as the ritual liturgy—similar to the enactment of a mass, and other characteristics—particularly the lively, interactive participatory ones—corresponding to aspects of religious drama performed in the marketplace. But the differences from these performances of the majority culture also bear implications for the way the haggadah was used as an object of material and visual culture. Rituals and liturgy of the mass were scripted, scored, and executed by clerical liturgical experts in the rarefied atmosphere of a sacred space and glimpsed only peripherally by the assembled worshippers. By way of contrast, the seder was not enacted by rabbis or precentors in the synagogue, but rather in a multivocal and multigenerational domestic context by lay persons—family members. Male and female, old and young gathered in a dynamic and boisterous home environment at an elaborately set seder table with a complexly arranged ritual meal. Though minutely choreographed, it is probably safe to say that the actual scene was far from the stately, serene, and graceful depictions in many haggadot, the alleged verisimilitude of which are often remarked upon by viewers. The polite, genteel, and ordered seder tables depicted there are best understood as ideal depictions—portrayals of what one's family portrait at this festive occasion might look like if one could only get one's children to sit still and be quiet. For it is entirely likely that in many cases this liturgy occurred against the backdrop of food being served, babies wailing, relatives arguing, and children jockeying for a glimpse of the beautifully illuminated book over the shoulder of the leader of the seder—usually a father or grandfather.

In such a kinetic environment, the haggadah was deployed in a manner different from that of Christian liturgical manuscripts, and much more analagous in spirit to the script for a religious drama for popular audiences, in which the actors were members of the community and where the assembled crowd was invited to respond to the action taking place onstage.²⁵

As the script for a quasi-private, semi-public enactment of ritual, the haggadah represented a middle ground between liturgical manuscripts kept in church treasuries and handled only by the gloved hands of the priests and deacons, or psalters read in the hush of a private chapel, and plays publicly performed by townspeople with manure on their shoes. Likewise, the enactment of the text fell between the relatively static mode of reading and its more active parallel, study, on the one hand, and the totally dynamic mode of performance on the other.

Finally, the kinetic, discursive, ad hoc way in which the haggadah text was discussed, and the practice of arrangement and juxtaposition of textual elements in order to create striking effects in aid of teaching moral and theological lessons, have distinct parallels in midrashic mentalities within Jewish culture. The haggadah *contains* midrash, but the process of the enactment of the haggadah also *creates* midrash, in living parallel to what I hope to demonstrate is accomplished by the iconography it also contains.

In the final analysis, beyond the ways these manuscripts expose the *mentalités* of their authorship or speak of a lived, performative, dramatized, kinetic environment of active exegesis, they reveal a vital poetic sensibility as well. The medieval Jews who commissioned and viewed them saw history as a continuum wherein Abraham's donkey, proceeding toward Isaac's near sacrifice and deliverance, could also be Moses' donkey, making its way from Midian to Egypt on a mission of liberation, and would ultimately be the messiah's donkey, plodding toward ultimate redemption. Certainly they incorporated particular midrashic details into their iconography, but they also evinced a midrashic sensibility that undergirds the entire range of illuminations in these works. The very use of images was already a stretch in terms of halakhah (Jewish law). Thus the images that medieval Jews did employ had to have meaning, both planned and perceived, to justify their use. In contending that the iconography of these works was exegesis rather than illustration, akin not to decorative ornament but rather to midrash, I see it as necessarily possessed of an internal meaningfulness and logic that justified its disposition and, by extension, its very existence.

It has long been acknowledged that Jewish visual culture in the medieval West resembled Christian visual culture, in that both were understood to "illustrate sacred history." But medieval Christian art was believed capable of doing something additional that might, on first consideration, seem unparalleled in Jewish culture with its long-standing taboo on imaging the Divine: it evoked the numinous, in many cases embodying the presence of Jesus or the saints and verifying their continuing sacred power. Accordingly, images were often objects of veneration, believed to have actual potency to heal, to witness, and to come to life, if necessary.²⁶

Indeed, one would be hard pressed to point to Jewish visual culture as explicitly depicting the sacred in the manner of Christian visual culture. The depiction of the Divine is assiduously avoided, in fact, and there is a distance maintained between the representation as a signifier and the thing signified, even in the case of nondivine figures. Instructive in this respect is the biblical description of the most explicitly angelomorphic of "holy images" in the Jewish tradition, those of the *kruvim*, the golden figures on the top of the Ark of the Covenant in the Wilderness Tabernacle and later in both Temples. Scripture deliberately describes the disembodied voice of God speaking not



FIGURE 2
 Cherubs on the Ark of the Covenant
 (reconstruction). From Moshe Levine,
The Tabernacle. Jerusalem: Soncino,
 1969

from the mouths of these figures, but from the handbreadth of space between them (see fig. 2). This neatly obviates the possibility that the *kruvim* themselves embodied God or were actual angels constrained in physical form.²⁷

In spite of the apparent reticence of the Jewish tradition to speak of art as embodying the sacred, there is a sense in which medieval Jewish visual culture does precisely that, in as striking a manner (if not so explicit or anthropomorphic) as it did for medieval Christians. It can be argued that in making art that gave visual expression to sacred narratives, medieval Jews created something that performed a function analogous to the embodiment of the sacred person in Christian icons. The practice of visualizing scriptural narrative manifested and “incarnated” what was most numinous for Jews: the biblical text, the concrete expression of God’s revelation to and continuing relationship with Israel.

Witness the opening folio of the Book of Numbers in a South German Pentateuch with Megillot, illuminated around 1300 (plate 1). Here, four knights hold banners with the symbols of the major tribes camped around each of the four sides of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, safe within small aedicula from the depredations of the grotesque hybrid monsters that surround them. I have demonstrated elsewhere how this illumination represents the principle of divine protection and providence, the predominant theme of the Book of Numbers. But what is important to note in the present context is that the Tabernacle is represented not as an architectural edifice but as a word—the opening word of the Book of Numbers, *Va-yiddaber*: “and [he—(God)] spoke.” This is not just any word; it represents the *Logos*—the word of God—manifest as the sacred center of everything. It literally stands in for the Tabernacle in the center of the Israelite camp, which was, after all, built to enshrine the Tablets of the Covenant: a physical manifestation of God’s word. It represents, by extension, the centrality of scripture—of God’s words to Moses—in the Israelite experience, in this biblical book, in the entirety of Pentateuch, and in subsequent Jewish tradition. This concept is profound in itself, but it is most fascinating that the creators of this manuscript chose to represent this concept visually: they chose to represent the primacy of the word in the tradition via the image.²⁸

In Christian tradition, a sacred image bears the imprint of historical tradition; it verifies the dreams of its beholders; it intervenes miraculously, raising a hand, crying out a word, inclining an ear, or shedding a tear. Art thus testifies to the continuity of revelation, and to the continuing relationship between God and God’s people through God’s saints, as represented by their images. Just as many are habituated to believe that

art cannot embody the sacred in Judaism, many likewise labor under the assumption that there can be no miraculous images in Judaism, no statues of saints who raise a hand to affirm a prayer.²⁹ Although this is generally true, again (as in the case of art embodying the sacred by visually manifesting sacred scripture), there is an analogy with Christian visual culture. The embodiment of sacred narrative in art also testifies, in its own way, to a continuity of revelation. Art is a form of exegesis; as such, it can serve the miraculous function of making continuously audible the still soft voice of divinity: reflecting, commenting upon, and even amplifying the revelation of God's will through scripture. Images became the mirror of revelation in history.

Deuteronomy 5:19 says of the revelation at Sinai, "These are the words that the LORD spoke . . . and God did not add [*ve-lo yassaf*] to them." The first-century Aramaic translation/commentary on this verse by Onkelos understands these words to mean that "God never ceased [*ve-lo passak*]." This subtle emendation subverts the text, which seeks to terminate revelation at Sinai, by opening it up to a seemingly infinite expansion. Yet it is completely in keeping with the rabbinic attitude toward the Sinaitic revelation; revelation is understood to continue through the exegesis of subsequent generations. The legal aspects of apprehending the divine will were understood to unfold via the halakhic process. The biblical narrative, too, was rendered interminable by means of midrash, the rabbinic method of scriptural interpretation, which was born during the period of the formation of the Mishnah in the second century of the Common Era, and by means of *parshanut*, the verse-by-verse commentaries of medieval scholars. In this study I will explore the compelling ways in which, alongside these traditional modes of text commentary, medieval Jews could employ iconography as exegesis, as a further manifestation of the continuing voice of Sinai.

THE BIRDS' HEAD HAGGADAH

Jerusalem, Israel Museum, MS 180/57,
South Germany (Mainz?), c. 1300





PLATE 2 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 1v

הר שיעור



יורה יעקב



הנהר האור אהו בכל
ארץ פגעו וארפה אתורע
ואתו לו את יעקב ואתו
ליעקב את יעקב ואת עשו
ואתו לעשו אתה שיעור
לרשת אהו ויעקב ובגור
ידו מיצרים

ליצרים



ברוך שומר הבטחתי
של ישר ברוד
הוא שהקפח מחשב את
הקין לעשות כמה שאמר
לאברהם אבני פרית בין



PLATE 4 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 12r

מתחלה עומי עבד

עבודך

זרה היו אבותינו ועבשיו

קורבני המקום לעבודתו

שנ' ויאמר יהושע אל כל

העם פה אומר יי' אלהי ישו

בעבר הנהר ישבו אבותיכם

מיעולם תרח אבי אברהם

ואבי נחור ויעבדו אלהים

אחרים

ולקח את אביכם את

אברהם מעבר



רִיעוּנֵנוּ כְּמִידָה שָׁנָה לְמִיעוּ
עֲוֹתָנוּ בְּסִבְלוֹתָנוּ
וַיְסֹן עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לַפְּרֵעָה
אֶת פִּיתוֹם וְאֶת רַעֲמִיסָה
רִיתָנוּ עֲלֵינוּ עֲבוֹדָה
קָשָׁה כְּמִידָה שָׁנָה
וַיַּעֲבִדוּנוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת־כְּנִיעַן
יֶשֶׁד פַּרְעֹה
וַנִּצְעַק אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֵת
אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע
יְיָ אֶת־קוֹלֵנוּ וַיִּרְאֵנוּ אֵת
עֲנִיֵּנוּ וְאֶת־עֲמִלֵּנוּ וְאֶת

והרבני והגדלי ותבואי בערי
ערים שדים נבוני ושעריד
צמיה ואת ערום ועריה
וירעו אותנו המינרים
וענו ויהנו על
עלנו עבודה קשה
וירעו אותנו המינרים
כמה שנחבה
נתחבמיה לו פן ירבה ויהיה
כי תקראנה מלחמיה ונעסה
גם היא על שונאינו ונלחם
בנו ועלה מז הארץ

את יצחק ואת יעקב
וירא את ענינו זו פ
פרישות דרך ארץ
כמה שש וירא אהים את
בני ישראל וירע אהים
ולא עמלנו אלו הכנע
כמה שש כל חבון
הילוד היאורה תשלימיהו
וכל חבת החיזון
ולא לחנינו זו הדחק
כמה שש וגבר את
את הלחץ אשר מצרים



לחיצני
 ונצק אל יארו
 אבותינו במה
 שנ' ויהי בימים הרבים ההם
 וימת מלך מצרים ויאצחו
 בני ישראל מן העבודה ויזע
 ויזעקו ותעל שועתם אל
 האלים מן העבודה
 וישמע יי' את קולתם
 במה שנ' וישמע
 אלים את צעקתם ויזכור
 אלים את בריתו את אברהם



PLATE 7 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 15v

וְיִצְרָה מִשְׁלַחַת מִלְאכֵי רַע
רְעִים אֶפְנֵי אַחַת עֶבְרָה שְׁתַּיִת
וְזַעַם שְׁלֹשׁ וְיִצְרָה אַרְבַּע ז'
מִשְׁלַחַת מִלְאכֵי רְעִים חֲמִי
חֲמִישֵׁי אֲמוּזֵר מִעֲתָה כְּמִינֵי
כְּמִינֵי צָרִים לִקְדֵי חֲמִישִׁים מִפּוֹת
וְעַל הַיָּם לִקְדֵי מֵאֲתָיִם וְחִמָּה
וְחֲמִישִׁים מִפּוֹרֵת
כְּמִינֵי מִעֲלָה טוֹבוֹת
לְמִיקוֹם עֲלֵינוּ
אֵילָן הַדְּזִינָעִי
מִפְּרִי צָרִים



אפי עברה וזעם ויצרה מִן
מישלחת מיל אבי רעים אפי
אחת עברה שתיים וזעם
שילש משלחת מיל אבי רי
רעים ארבע אמור מעתה
במצרים לקו מאתים מצות
עקיבא אומר מצות
אתה אומר שכל מצה
ומצה שהביא הקפה על
המצותיים במצות היתה
של חמש מצות שני שלח
בם חרוז אפי עברה וזעם

המלכות
ועל הים לבן



גַּלְגַּל נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת
מִמּוֹצֵם רֵיט
גַּלְגַּל נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת
מִמּוֹצֵם
גַּלְגַּל קָרַע לָנוּ
רֵיט אֶת הַיּוֹם
גַּלְגַּל קָרַע לָנוּ
אֶת הַיּוֹם
גַּלְגַּל הַעֲבִירָנוּ
פְּתוּחוֹ פְּחָרְבָה רֵיט
גַּלְגַּל הַעֲבִירָנוּ פְּתוּחוֹ
פְּחָרְבָה

PLATE 12 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 22r



PLATE 14 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 23r

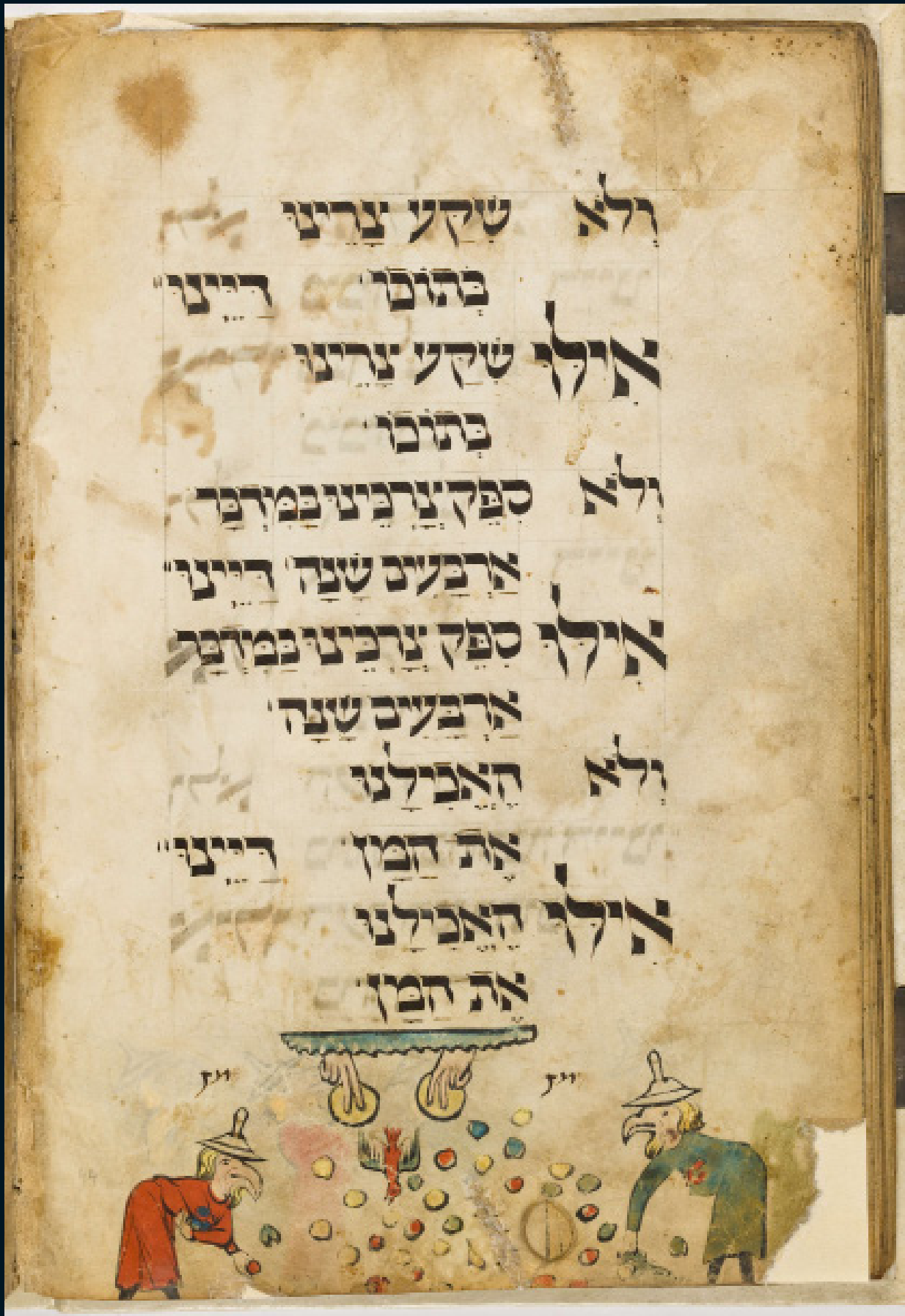


PLATE 13 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 22v

בתינו היציל ויקר העם

וישתחוו

מיצה זו שאנו אוכלין

על שום מידה על

שום שלא הספיק בפקד

של אבותינו להחמיין עד

שנגלה עליהם מלך מלכו

המלכים הקפדה וגאלם שנ

ויאפו את הכעק אשר הוד

הוציאו ממצרים עונות מי

מינות כי לא חמיין כי גורשו

ממצרים ולא יכלו להתב

מחמת רוב עונות
ביתנו היציל ויקר העם
וישתחוו
מיצה זו שאנו אוכלין
על שום מידה על
שום שלא הספיק בפקד
של אבותינו להחמיין עד
שנגלה עליהם מלך מלכו
המלכים הקפדה וגאלם שנ
ויאפו את הכעק אשר הוד
הוציאו ממצרים עונות מי
מינות כי לא חמיין כי גורשו
ממצרים ולא יכלו להתב



כֹּל שֶׁלֹא אָמַר שְׁלֹשָׁה
דְּבָרִים אֱלֹהֵי כַפֶּסֶחַ לֹא יֵצֵא
יְדֵי חוֹסְתוֹ אֱלֹהֵי חֵן פֶּסַח
מִצֵּחַ וּמִדָּוָד פֶּסַח שֶׁהוּא
אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אוֹכְלֵי כּוֹמֵץ עַל
שִׁבִית הַמִּקְרָשׁ קִיִּים עַל
שׁוֹב מִה עַל שׁוֹב שֶׁפֶסַח
הַמִּקְוֶה עַל כֶּתִי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
בְּמִצְרַיִם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַרְתֶּם וְכַח
פֶּסַח הוּא לֵיזֵן אֲשֶׁר פֶּסַח
עַל כֶּתִי כִּנֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם
פָּנַגְפוּ אֶת מִצְרַיִם וְזֹאת הִיא



PLATE 15 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 24v

אדם לראות את עיניו ה
מאלו היו יצא מפינינים
שנ והגרת לבנר פיוס ההו
ההוא לאמר בעבוד זר
עשה יי לי כנצאתי ממצרים
לא את אבותינו גאל
הקנה כלבד אלא
את אבותינו גאל עמיהם עו
שנ ואתנו הוניה מישם
למיש חביא אותנו לתת
לע את הארץ אשר נשבע

לאבותינו



לְהַתְּמַחֲמַח וְגַם יַעֲרָה לֵאמֹר
עָשׂוּ לָהֶם
מִדְּרוֹר זֶה שְׂאֵנֵי אוֹב
אוֹבְלִיז עַל
שׂוֹם מִיָּה עַל שׂוֹם שְׂמִירָהוּ
הַמִּצְרִיִּים אֶת חַיֵּי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
בְּמִצְרַיִם שֶׁנֶּזְוִימָרְרוּ אֶת
חַיֵּיהֶם בְּעִבּוּרָה קָשָׁה בְּחוֹמוֹ
וּבְלִבְעִים וּבְכַל עִבּוּרָה בְּשִׂרָה
אֶת כָּל עִבּוּרְתֶּם אֲשֶׁר עָרַף
עֲבָדֶיךָ בְּהֵם בְּפֶרֶד
בְּכָל

דוֹר וְדוֹר חַיֵּי



הַצְּסִים הָאֵלֹהִים הַרְצִינֵנִי מִיָּד
מִעֲבָרוֹת לְחַיִּימוֹת וּמִיִּצְוֹן ז'
לְשִׁמְחָה וּמֵאֵבֶל לְיוֹם טוֹב
מֵאֲפִלָּה לְאוֹר גְּדוֹל מֵעַתָּה
מִשִּׁיעֲבוֹד לְגֵאוּלָּה וְנֶאֱמַר
לְפָנֶיךָ הֵלְלוּ יְיָ
הֵלְלוּ יְיָ הֵלְלוּ עַבְדֵי
יְיָ הֵלְלוּ אֶת
שֵׁם יְיָ יְהוִי שֵׁם יְיָ מִבוֹרֵךְ
מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם מִמְזֻרָח
שָׁמַיִשׁ עַד מִבוֹאֵי מִחֲלָל ז'
שֵׁם יְיָ רַם עַל כָּל אֲדָמָה יְיָ עַל

שם יי
הללו
מז

בוקר ערב
ליום טוב
ביום אסור
לדאבדבוינות
וינון לקנין
תהיה

PLATE 20 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 27r



וְעַתָּה יְהוָה
 אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִשְׁמַע
 בְּקוֹלֵנוּ וְיִשְׁמַח
 בְּעֲבוּרֵנוּ וְיִשְׁמַח
 בְּעֲבוּרֵנוּ וְיִשְׁמַח
 בְּעֲבוּרֵנוּ וְיִשְׁמַח

כוונת
 הנהגה
 שיש
 לומר
 וישמח

אֶתְחַנֵּן חַיִּיבִין לָהּ
 לְחֻדְרוֹת לְהַלֵּל לְשִׁמְחָה לָהּ
 לְפָנָי לְרוֹמֵם לְחֻדְרָה לְפָנָי
 לְעֵלָה וּלְקַלֵּס לְמִי שֶׁעָשָׂה
 לְאַמְתֵּנוּ וְלֵנוּ אֵת הַ



PLATE 19 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 26v

כי אמילם דחה דחיתני
לנפול ריז עורני עוי חומני
חומדת יה ויהי לי לישועה
קול רנה גישועה באהל
צדיקים ימין יז עושה חיל
ימין יז חומסיה ימין יז עז
עושה חיל לא אמות בני
אחיה ואספר מעשה יה
יסוד יסרני יה ולמות לא
נתנני פתחו לי שערי צדק
אבא כב אודה יה זה הנה
השער ליה צדיקים יבוא



PLATE 22 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 33r

מין חמיצר קראתי יזה
ענני במרחב יזה
יה לי לא אורא מה יעשה
לי אדם יה לי בעודי ואני
קראה בשוונאי טוב לחי
לחסות ביה מבטוח בארם
טוב לחסות ביה מבטוח
פגריבים כל גוים סבבוני
בשם יה כי אמילם סבבוני
גם סבבוני בשם יה כי אמילם
אמילם סבבוני פגריבים
דועבו פאש קוצים בשם יה



PLATE 24 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 47r



PLATE 23 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 46v

Birds' Head Revisited

1

THE SO-CALLED BIRDS' HEAD Haggadah, probably illuminated in Mainz around 1300 and now in the collection of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (MS 180/57), is the earliest surviving illustrated version of the haggadah text. It possesses all the classic qualities of a perpetual enigma. Within the rather modest field of Jewish visual culture it is, in its own unassuming way, as mysterious as the Pyramids of Giza, the monoliths of Easter Island, or Mona Lisa's smile.

The manuscript's forty-seven remaining folios are graced with two full-page illuminations and thirty-three pages containing marginal illustrations that depict a variety of figures—young and old, male and female—enacting the narratives of the Exodus and engaged in the religious observance of Passover eve.¹

Curiously, although provided with the bodies of human beings, these figures are in most cases represented not with human heads but with the countenances of sharp-beaked and sharp-eyed birds. In some cases, these bird heads are supplemented by animal ears. (The issue of precisely which animal these ears are “borrowed” from will be important to my argument as it progresses. For the moment, it should simply be noted that the ears are mammalian, rounded and with a slight point.) Some figures also sport distinctly human accoutrements, such as hair, beards, and a variety of headgear. Among these are what has come to be called the *Judenhut*, depicted throughout the manuscript on mature male figures (fig. 3). In particular cases males wear a beret (folio 8r) and a cap secured under the chin (folio 7v), and there are also decorated and undecorated snoods for women (plates 2, 17).

To the twentieth-century eye, the juxtaposition of human bodies with birds' heads is quirky, disquieting, and seemingly impenetrable. It is susceptible to all the most compelling modes of interpretation; it is a riddle to be solved, a treasure hunt to be embarked upon. For some, its weird and perhaps comic or grotesque images might evoke diverse and often nightmarish parallels: Thoth of ancient Egypt, the bird-headed genii from the palace of Assurnasirpal, or Garuda of Hindu mythology. Others may observe commonalities with similar hybrids in Bosch, Grandville, and Escher. And there are those who might maintain that there is a psychohistory to be written here; because bird-headed figures, from the simply weird to the abjectly terrifying, seem to have haunted the human imagination for so many thousands of years, one is naturally inclined to ask why.²



FIGURE 3
“Fully accoutered” male bird-headed figure, with hair, ears, and *Judenhut*, washing his hands. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 5v (detail)

I leave it to others to connect the anonymous illuminators of this manuscript with ancient stone carvers, fifteenth-century painters, or modern-day dreamers and dream interpreters alike. My intention here is to raise some questions about the iconography of this important manuscript in its own religious, historical, social, and political context. It is my hope that the modes of analysis I employ can help model the kinds of inquiry I believe are still a desideratum in the field of medieval Jewish visual culture.

Because it can be placed historically within the context of Ashkenaz, possibly in the city of Mainz, around 1300, the Birds' Head Haggadah can be understood within the scope of a particular *histoire des mentalités*. Even so, the manuscript defies summary categorization, evincing both consistencies of iconography and what have been described as glaring inconsistencies. As the earliest-known illuminated haggadah, the first and only stand-alone haggadah manuscript to employ zoocephalic (animal-headed) figures, and a work full of “unexpected” details, it deserves scrutiny as prelude to serious reappraisal of the mystery of animal-headed figures in the wider panoply of Ashkenazic illuminated manuscripts. Furthermore, because the Birds' Head Haggadah has been scrutinized by so many for so long, a consideration of its analysis can serve as a critique of the historiography of Jewish visual culture as it is currently constituted.³

Like previous researchers—indeed, like anyone in the present age who has had the privilege of viewing this manuscript—I am intrigued by the problem of its conception. I wonder why its patrons and illuminators were moved to grace most of the figures depicted in it with the heads of birds. I seek to understand which scenes from the Exodus narrative and the seder ritual the authorship chose to include, and why the illuminations were arranged in their particular sequence. But I am equally fascinated by the “posthistory” of the Birds' Head Haggadah: How was it received by subsequent generations of viewers? What did they think about the birds' heads? How did they understand the manuscript's configuration, style, and mood? In attempting to determine what the images, so strange to postmodern eyes, might have meant historically, one must consider not only the conception of the manuscript by the original patrons and the interpretation of their charge by the illuminators they hired, but its reception by its initial and subsequent audiences and owners, by twentieth-century academic scholars, and, finally, by the contemporary viewer, gazing at this cultural treasure in a museum case or in facsimile.

My interest in revisiting the issues raised by the Birds' Head Haggadah was, in fact, sparked by its reception by a particular twentieth-century viewer. I had, frankly, considered the manuscript to be a closed book; all that could be written on it had been written. To my mind, it was a simple if somewhat confused work. Though intriguing, the quirks of its iconography had long ago been noted and catalogued, and various solutions to its mysteries proposed. And although new and occasionally irksome interpretations of the birds' heads occasionally arose, how much more was there, really, to add? But in the



FIGURE 4
Glossed illustrations. Note the bare-headed child or young man retrieving the afikoman. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 27v (detail)

course of perusing the elegant 1965 facsimile of the manuscript with my then ten-year-old son, Misha, I discovered—through his fresh and art-historically untutored eyes—a number of interesting things about this haggadah that had escaped attention or consideration.

First of all, while Misha certainly noticed the birds' heads and quite liked them, he didn't find them at all outrageous or disturbing. This accepting and approving reaction may simply have been a result of his having grown up in an eclectic and peculiar household, or it may have been a symptom of preadolescent world-weariness. But it did give me pause to consider how the manuscript might have been received by its various owners and audiences over time. It raised the possibility that, although the birds' heads may seem bizarre to us, throughout their long historical odyssey they might have elicited any one of a spectrum of reactions, ranging from abhorrence to bemusement.

Evidence suggests that over the centuries the manuscript has been more treasured than abhorred. It has been shielded from outside assault for seven hundred years, escaping innumerable possible catastrophes, from neglect to confiscation and disappearance, from accidental fire and flood to deliberate destruction. Even more remarkable is the fact that a volume with such unusual and esoteric illuminations survived internal assault relatively unscathed. In spite of the celebrated reverence of Jews for their books, had this manuscript represented something totally at odds with Jewish cultural or legal norms, it would almost certainly have been radically "corrected": censored, defaced, or even put away in a *genizah* by subsequent owners who found its illustrations bizarre, embarrassing, or heretical.⁴

Yet such was not the case; on the contrary, the various owners of the Birds' Head Haggadah annotated the text and provided the illustrations with captions and occasional iconographic "corrections" (fig. 4). The work of several later hands is evident, the earliest roughly contemporary with the manuscript. These annotations, captions, and corrections testify that, beyond a merely lukewarm toleration of the unobjectionable nature of their iconography, the illustrations of this manuscript exerted a compelling hold on the imagination of generations of viewers who were moved to dialogue with the iconography. It is in these scribbles and scrawls that one can best read the evidence of its reception by its original audience and subsequent owners.⁵

Each generation of scholars and viewers participates in a dialectic with several “voices” in the manuscript. There is, of course, the voice of the illuminations and the narratives they represent, and the voice of the captions, graffiti, and annotations of previous audiences. But there is also much to be learned about the reception of the Birds’ Head Haggadah, by interpreting not only what its owners have written in it but what scholars have written about it.

Research on the manuscript is ultimately a collective effort. Each investigator must decide on the basis of his or her observations not only how to read the iconography but also even what is most basically true about the Birds’ Head Haggadah, and what that says about its authorship and milieu. Is the manuscript’s style naive or sophisticated, the last gasp of the Romanesque or the first flowering of the Gothic? Should its iconography be understood as strictly literal or as highly symbolic? Are the dispositions and sequence of its scenes fresh and original, or are they misunderstandings of a previous model? Does the use of birds’ heads set an overall tone for the manuscript that is breezy and comic or solemn and disturbing? Each scholar’s personal vision of what constitutes a significant iconographical issue in the manuscript stands on its own, but the questions each asks are also, indisputably, a titration of particular and distinctive prejudices, expertise, deficiencies, preoccupations, obsessions, and foibles. They reveal as much about the researchers as human beings as they do about the work itself. Because it is such a strange and wonderful manuscript pervaded with so much mystery, it is like a vast mirror held up to all who study it. And because it will continue to serve as a mirror to future generations of viewers and scholars, the Birds’ Head Haggadah can never be a closed book.

Nothing definitive is known about the commission of the manuscript. All that remains of the original stratum of the conception are the interpretations of that commission by the artists. Because the haggadah was accepted from the illuminators (who were presumably paid a significant sum) and treasured and preserved for generations, it can be surmised that the manuscript, as ultimately configured, represents the artist’s accurate interpretation of the commission of the patrons. It seems likely that the patrons specified most of the general elements of the iconography and sequence, while the artists, with prior consultation and approval, developed these elements. The patrons most probably specified that the depiction of human features was to be avoided. Still, given the dramatic nature of the specific method of avoidance, it is hard to imagine that there was no discussion of what form it would take.

THE BIRDS’ HEADS: THEIR USE AND MEANING

The most enduring enigma of the Birds’ Head Haggadah revolves around the bird-headed figures, the manuscript’s most striking feature. The interpretation of these figures is the most important test case for understanding how the manuscript was received, from its initial commission some seven hundred years ago to the present.

Scholarship on the topic of the zoocephalic phenomenon in medieval Jewish illumination can be divided into three streams.⁶ The first presents a theological or religious studies perspective on the phenomenon of facial distortion and zoocephalism: Zofia Ameisenowa correlated the zoocephalism in Jewish visual culture with its occurrence in Roman mystery religion and early and medieval Christianity, concluding that animal heads were often applied to figures in order to highlight the exalted, righteous status of the individual depicted.⁷

A second stream of interpretation considers the phenomenon as linked to halakhic restrictions on the depiction of human faces. Meyer Schapiro and H. C. L. Jaffé, who examined the Birds' Head Haggadah specifically, understood the disapproval of representational art in the responsa of R. Meir of Rothenberg (the MaHaRaM, c. 1215–1293) to be a watershed in this respect: Jaffé ascribed the appearance in some manuscripts of human figures with both animal and human faces to their creation after the death of the MaHaRaM, when his proscriptions had fallen into desuetude or were imperfectly understood. Bezalel Narkiss believed the halakhic scruples to have emerged from a more zealous context. He asserted that the zoocephalic phenomenon was adopted as an extreme pietistic measure, under the influence of the stringent recasting of mainstream medieval interpretations of talmudic discourse on the visual representation of human figures by the pietistic *Hassidei 'Ashkenaz* community. After surveying previous research on the problem, Narkiss concluded that patrons, attempting to find a middle ground, ordered the distortion of the human figures in the manuscripts. By the time of this manuscript's creation, the animal-headed figures had come to be regarded as merely decorative elements, the original impetus behind their employment having been forgotten.⁸

The third trend in interpretation is sociopolitical. Heinrich Strauss resisted predetermining a single explanation for all examples of the zoocephalic phenomenon, particularly a halakhic one, maintaining instead that animal-headed figures in Jewish visual culture emerged from the sociopolitical context of Jewish-Christian relations in the Middle Ages. Because Jews lacked a tradition of depicting human figures, the images were adopted wholesale from stereotypical anti-Jewish depictions of Jews in Christian art. They continued to be troped in an anti-Jewish manner even when they appeared in Jewish manuscripts. Ruth Mellinkoff takes Strauss' problematic argument even further, insisting that the manuscripts were produced by Christian artists who were "anti-semitic" (an anachronistic term with reference to medieval iconography). These artists somehow foisted these representations upon their gullible Jewish patrons. And the patrons, in spite of the blatant negativity of the images and the high prices they presumably paid for the manuscripts, accepted these insulting images without complaint, habituated as they were, according to Mellinkoff, to "looking without seeing" because of the constancy of anti-Jewish imagery around them. Mellinkoff's interpretation is difficult to take seriously; it requires an entire supporting cast of maximally ignorant, minimally oblivious

collaborators, making medieval Jews out to be as blind as some Christians alleged them to be.⁹

All of these studies relied upon comparative methodologies of various kinds, adducing parallels and influences from cultures near and far, like the zoocephalic gods of the ancient Near East or animal-headed saints from the European Middle Ages. They “explained” the birds’ heads on the basis of halakhic prohibitions and “anti-semitic” caricature. The problem remains that, without a shred of documentary evidence concerning the original commission, it seems fruitless even to presume to speculate about authorial intent. I will take a somewhat different approach here, noting the internal evidence of the illuminations. This turns out to be richer than it seems at first glance, for the manuscript affords one an opportunity to situate the class of bird-headed figures relative to another class of figures found within its pages.

The Birds’ Head Haggadah contains both bird-headed figures and figures without birds’ heads. Though most of the figures are bird-headed, there are some whose human faces are replaced with featureless ovals (fig. 5; see figs. 15, 16). Close examination of the manuscript reveals the now faintly visible features on some of the “blank” heads to be a later addition, an iconographic “annotation” by later owners puzzled or disturbed by the lack of features, which obviously seemed incomplete to them. The existence of these featureless human heads has been noted, but the possibility of employing them in internal comparison with the bird-headed figures has remained unexplored.¹⁰

The least common denominator between the birds’ heads and the blank, featureless faces is that both of these types of representation exemplify measures taken to obscure the human face. This seems to have been the factor par excellence that transformed an innocuous image into a potentially idolatrous one for the authorship of this manuscript as well as for other monuments of visual culture in fourteenth-century Ashkenaz. In order to conform to the halakhic mandate to avoid the creation of a “graven image” it was not the whole body but the human countenance that needed to be obscured, distorted, erased, or replaced.¹¹ The fact that the authorship of the Birds’ Head Haggadah employs two distinct approaches (erasure and replacement) to avoid transgression of the boundaries of idolatry makes two general iconographic groups available for comparison. Comparing the two, one can glimpse something of the perceptions of the authorship with regard to each group, and their intentions in depicting each in a different manner. As I unravel this differentiation, the motivation of the authorship for the use of the bird-headed figures will become clear.

Following Narkiss, the bird-headed figures are commonly described—in such venues as the Israel Museum’s own Web site—as an extreme pietistic measure to avoid the depiction of the human countenance. Perhaps this interpretation was born out of an inability to conceive of such a bizarre and fanciful treatment of the human image as emerging

from anywhere other than the twisted and febrile imagination of religious fanatics. Whatever its origin, this view is regrettably persistent, in spite of the fact that Hans Jaffé had, as early as 1967, convincingly argued that the expediency of the birds' heads in fact reflects a liberal halakhic position rather than an extreme one. He demonstrated this by contrasting the strongly aniconic stance of Judah the Pious, the disapproval (without absolute prohibition) of the MaHaRaM, and what might be called the "compromise position" of R. Ephraim of Ratisbon (Regensburg, 1133–1200), who forbade the depiction in visual art of the human face alone. R. Ephraim did not mention replacing human faces with those of birds or animals, but in other responsa he does allow the depiction of birds and animals, particularly if they appear in two dimensions. While it cannot be known whether R. Ephraim would have a priori countenanced the specific solution of the illuminators of this haggadah, his other, relatively lenient, opinions regarding the two-dimensional depiction of animals suggest that he would not have objected to it post facto.¹²

To summarize: the various methods of circumventing the portrayal of the human face in Jewish illuminated manuscripts, including erasure, distortion, and zoocephalism, arose from an halakhic impulse as reflected in contemporary responsa. A strict response to the halakhic prohibition of the depiction of the human countenance is manifested in the Birds' Head Haggadah in the use of featureless ovals in place of some faces. A more lenient approach is manifested in the employment of bird-headed figures to depict other characters in the manuscript. This choice speaks both in favor of a more liberal (rather than a more pietistic) socioreligious context, and in support of the meaningfulness of the iconographic choice to replace the human face with that of a particular bird.

Viewing the images through a halakhic lens, however, explains only how these bird-headed figures have the "right to exist" under a particular dispensation of Jewish law. But would the authorship have expended the considerable ingenuity necessary to create such lively and nuanced images if they were merely seeking a technical expedient to avoid the depiction of the human face? Who are the bird-headed figures intended to depict, and who is represented by the blank-faced figures, and why?

Here, again, I am in debt to the unprejudiced observations of my son. Misha was intrigued by the interplay between the birds' heads and the featureless human faces, and he attempted, as ten-year-olds will, to fit the two into a fail-safe and universally applicable morphology of binary opposition.

Observing that Pharaoh and his host, who are shown pursuing the departing Israelites, are depicted without birds' heads, he inferred that "all the *mizrim* (Egyptians) have normal faces, and all the *bnei Yisra'el* (Jews) have bird's faces" (plates 15–16; fig. 5). This generalization seemed to be a plausible strategy for distinguishing the two groups of



FIGURE 5
Blank-faced Pharaoh and his entourage, some with facial features added later. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 24v (detail)

figures—the featureless and the bird-headed—in the manuscript. I understood how, to Misha, this might have seemed a good way of organizing the images. But, smug in what I supposed was my superior art-historical expertise, I thought I saw his error immediately. I decided, in the best treasure-hunting fashion, to help him to discover for himself that there were two *mizrim* (situated directly behind Pharaoh) who did, in fact, sport birds’ heads: “Look again, Misha—this time more carefully: Do all the *mizrim* really have normal faces? Can you spot the two who don’t?” The child did not miss a beat. “Abba,” he exhaled, with the exasperated air of one who catches his father pretending not to know something he ought to, “anybody can tell that that’s Datan and Aviram!” In response to my puzzled look, he explained: “The *nogshim* [Jewish taskmasters]! See? One of them has a whip and the other has a club, so they *have* to be Datan and Aviram!” (fig. 6).



FIGURE 6
Datan and Aviram pursuing the
Israelites. Birds’ Head Haggadah,
fol. 24v (detail)

Nogshim, indeed. To paraphrase Proverbs, out of the mouths of babes and Jewish day school-educated children is established wisdom. Hans Jaffé did not distinguish between the figures in question and the Egyptians around them in any way. He describes the two figures as a “shield-bearer” and a “rider” in the entourage of Pharaoh. Jaffé assumed that, because these figures ride alongside Pharaoh and the Egyptians (shown here in the garb of medieval knights) they must of necessity *be* Egyptians. Ruth Mellinkoff, while noting the differences between Jews and Egyptians in the manuscript, merely designated the two bird-headed figures as Egyptian soldiers, without attempting to explain their avian features. Like these scholars, I had always concluded that because they formed part of the Egyptian group, these figures were bird-headed Egyptians. I did not puzzle over the disjunction between the bird-headed Egyptians and the faceless remaining members of the group. Whether from surfeit of scholarly politesse or lack of ten-year-old chutzpah, my distinguished predecessors, my esteemed colleagues, and I had all failed to observe that the distinction between bird-headed and blank-featured figures seems to be a way of differentiating between *mizrim* and *bnei Yisra’el*—or, to put it more bluntly, between Jews and non-Jews.¹³

Meyer Schapiro alone among the researchers of the Birds’ Head Haggadah came closest to Misha’s candid observation by accentuating the positive role the birds’ heads play in signifying Jewish identity. In the manuscript, he tells us, “the Birds’ Head is so general in the representation of Jews that it may be regarded there as a symbol of the Jewish people.”¹⁴ But for all his acuity, Schapiro genteelly avoided any forthright formulation of the counterassociation: that the blank faces signify non-Jews. Misha instinctively, immediately, and almost unconsciously understood that if figures with birds’ heads appear in the Egyptian camp, they are not Egyptians with displaced birds’ heads. Rather, they must be “displaced Jews” of some kind.¹⁵

Which displaced Jews might appear in the Egyptian camp? They are “obviously” Datan and Aviram, the Jewish taskmasters who remained in Egypt and advised Pharaoh on how to capture the Israelites, riding out with him to the Sea of Reeds. But this truth is self-evident only for those for whom the midrashic metanarrative is inextricably intertwined with the biblical text, whether fourteenth-century Jews in Mainz or twentieth-century ten-year-olds in Jewish day schools.¹⁶

To my chagrin, Misha was right; there is in fact a neat binary opposition between the two manners of effacing the human countenance: all the Jewish characters—all the central actors in the ritual illuminations, the narrative sequences, and the eschatological images—are depicted as bird-headed figures regardless of whether they are male or female, young or old, within the community or having “gone over” to the Egyptian side. On the other hand, all non-Jewish, angelic, and celestial figures in the manuscript, including those of Egyptians, angels, and the sun and moon, are depicted with blank human heads (see figs. 15, 16).

The authorship of the Birds’ Head Haggadah employed forethought in the choices it made from the range of possible ways to avoid representation of the human face. So rather than treat these images as a simple stopgap measure of aniconism, I will attend to the specific manner in which they are configured for clues as to their iconographic meaningfulness. An investigation of the authorial choices and the possible reactions to those choices on the part of the manuscript’s audience opens gateways to an understanding of both the conception and the reception of this fascinating book.

BEYOND THE HALAKHIC DEFAULT: A HIERARCHY OF CHOSENNESS AND OTHERNESS

Why would the authorship make a distinction between the way the countenances of Jews are obscured and the manner in which the faces of others are concealed? What hierarchies are inherent in the choice to depict Jews with birds’ heads and others with blank faces? I have noted that the use of featureless ovals in place of the human faces of non-Jews is a halakhically strict approach. But it is also iconographically literalist—an actual erasure of the countenance. Of the range of options for avoiding the depiction of the face, erasure is the simplest and most radical. It is, so to speak, the default position. In this approach, the figure is human, and the mandate to avoid the depiction of the countenance is accomplished by a simple obviation of facial features.

While replacing the faces of Jews with birds’ heads is more halakhically lenient, it also is more nuanced; it has more potential for iconographic richness than does mere erasure. The replacement of human features with those of birds satisfies the halakhah in avoiding the depiction of the human face, but the fascinating variety and individuation in how these figures are illuminated far exceeds the default of erasure. As in the case of the “erased” default, the figure is again human, and again the artists refrain from depicting

a human face. But here the similarity ends. Rather than merely leaving the faces blank, they replaced the human head with that of a specific type of bird, represented in a lively variety of ways and in a highly individuated manner, differentiated according to age, sex, and status (plate 19). This variety represents an attempt to go beyond merely satisfying the halakhah, and it far exceeds the default of the featureless face.

There is no escaping the fact that depicting non-Jewish, angelic, and celestial figures with featureless human heads but showing Jewish figures with lively and distinctive birds' heads is evidence both of authorial deliberation and of iconographic significance. Because they exceed the standard expediency of avoiding the depiction of the human face, the birds' heads must be read as meaningful iconographic elements in all their fullness and variety. On the other hand, because of the dramatic contrast between the blank faces and the highly individuated birds' heads, the blank faces must also be read as iconographically meaningful in their very emptiness.

If the choice to thus represent Jews is not merely the default but is intentional and significant, it is reasonable to believe that the type of bird depicted should be of consequence. What kind of bird head is chosen as a substitute for the Jewish face, and what meaning does it have that would compel the authors to use *it*—halakhically liberal and artistically challenging as it might be—rather than any other substitute?

WHAT KIND OF BIRD?

The figures depicted in the Birds' Head Haggadah are not birds but composite creatures. Even their heads are composite, blending in most cases the beaked profile of a bird with a beard and pointed mammalian ears. One creature in particular in the medieval bestiary is configured in exactly this fashion. That animal is the griffin, a composite of lion and eagle pervasive in heraldry, manuscript illumination, textiles, and metalwork in the Rhineland valley from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries (figs. 7, 8).

Ruth Mellinkoff builds her thesis imagining “anti-semitic” Christian artists working for oblivious Jewish patrons on the basis of her interpretation of the animal ears of the figures as pigs' ears, along with other elements, such as the prolific depiction of the bird heads. But, as I have said, this idea stretches the imagination. Instead, it makes more sense to assume that the griffins' heads were the specific choice of the patrons. Far from being anti-Jewish caricatures, the griffin-headed figures in the Birds' Head Haggadah are dignified portrayals of Jews, full of character and personality. All are going seriously about their business or are posed with stateliness and monumentality in spite of the singular strangeness of their heads.¹⁷

The manuscript's subsequent owners clearly accepted the griffin-headed figures as well: they preserved them, rather than effacing or even commenting negatively or in a perplexed manner upon them, even though the book is full of comments on the subjects



of the illuminations. However strange they seem to the postmodern eye, it is essential to consider what griffins might have evoked for the authorship of the Birds' Head Haggadah and to try to understand why the griffin, rather than any other animal, was adopted as the creature most emblematic of Jews.

THE GRIFFIN: A CONSCIOUS CHOICE

Griffins appear in Jewish iconography of antiquity as one of the many pan-Hellenistic symbols employed by Jews, Christians, and pagans alike.¹⁸ The particular form of the griffin heads depicted in the Birds' Head Haggadah is typical, as I have noted, of those found in many aspects of material culture of the Rhineland Valley during this period. But while the creatures represented in the Birds' Head Haggadah have the heads of griffins, their bodies are human. As hybrid creatures, conjoining various aspects of the physiognomy of lions, eagles, and humans, they most resemble the various forms of the sphinx known from earliest antiquity in Egypt and the Middle East. They reverse the morphology, however: instead of having human heads and animal bodies, they have human bodies and animal heads.

Sphinxlike creatures, of course, are among the most famous, numinous, and mysterious of images in the notoriously aniconic culture of ancient Israel and the rabbinic period, and such beings have a distinguished history in subsequent Jewish iconography. The golden *kruvim*, the cherubs surmounting the *kapporet*, or covering, of the Ark of the Covenant, seem to have been a kind of sphinx. But beyond the fact that they had human faces and wings, the exact physical configuration of these paradoxical figures is

FIGURE 7
Griffin. Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS li.4.26, Bestiary, England, 13c., fol. 6v (detail)

FIGURE 8
Griffin. Acquamanile, Germany (Nuremberg), c. 1130. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.1413)



FIGURE 9
Winged sphinx/cherub. Ivory plaque,
Phoenician, 9th–8th century BCE.
Found at Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud
(ancient Kalhu), northern Iraq. British
Museum ANE 134322, Room 57, The
Ancient Levant, case 12, no. 5

undescribed (see fig. 2). The composition of the bodies of the *kruvim*—whether leonine or human—is unclear. It is mentioned only ambiguously in the biblical text, and rabbinic sources decline to discuss it, perhaps deeming the subject inappropriate or conducive to heretical speculation. So, while reconstructions by biblical archaeologists where the *kruvim* are depicted as lion-bodied sphinxes are not unfeasible, neither can they be corroborated by any physical evidence, by accounts outside the Bible, or in rabbinic lore (fig. 9).¹⁹

Both the biblical text and rabbinic lore are more explicit regarding the images of lions and eagles that were woven into the curtain of the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple (fig. 10). While some rabbinic texts assert that the lions alternated with the eagles, other sources describe the veil as having been woven translucently, with the lions on the outside and the eagles on the inside, arranged in such a way that when one looked at the curtain one had the impression of lions with eagles' wings, or griffins. As a stand-in for the *kruvim*, the griffin appears often in later Jewish visual culture, from the Middle Ages through the twentieth century (figs. 11, 12).²⁰

The rabbis asserted that images with leonine, aquiline, and human components were chosen for the holiest places in the Tabernacle and the Temple because they represented three of the creatures of the divine chariot, as visualized in the opening chapter of Ezekiel.²¹

The figures in the Birds' Head Haggadah, like the griffins in later Jewish visual culture, might be understood to continue the cherubic topos that appeared in the Tabernacle

and the Temple. Like the cherubs on the Ark and the curtain of the Holy of Holies, they represent a combination of three of the four creatures of the divine Chariot: lion, eagle, and human. Accordingly, they might be interpreted as emphasizing the connection of Jews with the divine, wherein the Jewish body is equated with the Chariot, an idea present in mystical literature contemporary with the creation of the manuscript (fig. 13).²²

Alternative to this somewhat esoteric understanding of the figures, the use of lion/eagle/human hybrids may broadcast what could be called a political message. The eagle—the contemporary symbol of the German emperor (as illustrated on the imperial flag; see fig. 5)—might represent the Jews’ imperial allegiance or responsibility, while the lion might signify their association with the tribe of Judah; that is, their identity as Jews. This sort of simultaneous reading is possible because, as signifiers, lions and eagles are so richly polyvalent.²³

But even at the most basic level of rabbinic and medieval Jewish symbolic language—presupposing no mystical leanings or political agenda on the part of the authorship—the griffin is still a creature fraught with meaning: its aquiline characteristics represent swiftness, while its leonine features signify boldness. Rabbinic texts are clear about the positive qualities embodied by lions and eagles. They emphasize the strength, fearlessness, watchfulness, and protectiveness of both creatures. Eagles are associated with the East; they are the bird of the sun. They are connected with the Exodus and, of course, with imperial power, transcendence, and rescue. Lions are associated with the royal throne of David, with stability, gravitas, and nobility (fig. 14). They may also have been a particular symbol of the Jews of Mainz, who are described as leonine and aquiline in addition to human in Kalonymus b. Judah’s famous *kinah* for the Ninth of Av, commemorating the martyrs of the First Crusade: “For the noble ones of the esteemed congregation of Mainz, who were swifter than eagles and stronger than lions.”²⁴

Seen in this light, the griffins’ heads, with their multiple possibilities for meaningfulness, are neither simply agents of radical pietistic erasure of the human visage nor a more liberal makeshift compromise. They represent an additional, very sophisticated step on the part of the authorship of the Birds’ Head Haggadah, simultaneously



FIGURE 10
Lions and eagles alternating on the curtain of the Tabernacle. *Duke of Sussex's German Pentateuch*, fol. 137r

FIGURE 11
 Cloven-hoofed, wingless griffin (also called an alce or a keythong in later heraldry) symbolizing the sun, and two-legged dragon (wyvern) symbolizing the moon. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Or. 321, *Laud Maḥzor*, Germany, 1250–1260, fol. 57v (detail)

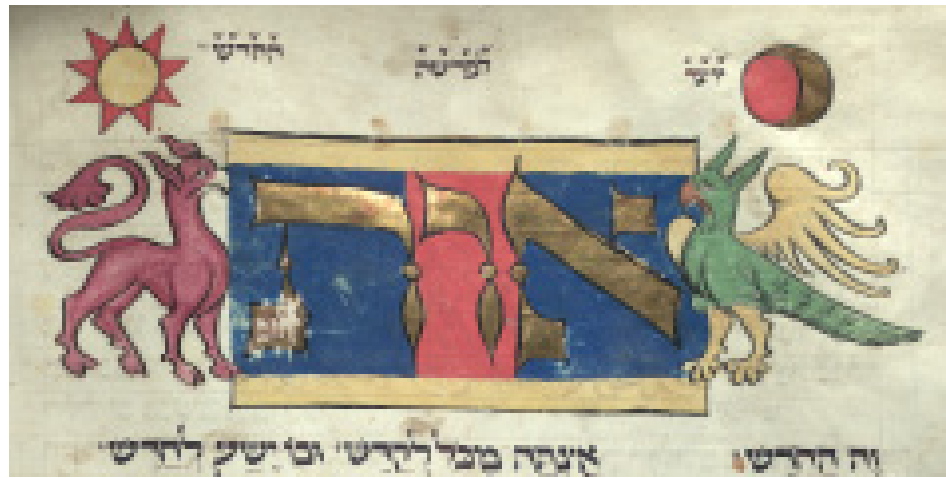


FIGURE 12
 Griffin. Eliezer Zusman Katz, Synagogue of Horb, Southern Germany, 1755. Israel Museum



FIGURE 13
 The Bearers of the Divine Chariot. Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, MS 1102/I–II, *Leipzig Maḥzor*, Germany, c. 1310–1320, fol. 31v





FIGURE 14

Synagogue scene bordered by the four beasts of R. Judah b. Tema, with lion and eagle on the left-hand corners of the frame of the central image.

Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Codex Rossiana 555, Jacob b. 'Asher, *'Arba'h Turim*, Italy, 1435, fol. 12v

moving away from the exoteric depiction of the human face and toward the esoteric portrayal of the human countenance as something beyond itself. As such, they suggest a quest on the part of that authorship for a positive mode of representation that could distinguish Jews from non-Jews. The use of the griffins' heads emphasizes that it is ultimately not a physical distinction that makes a Jew a Jew. The qualities represented by the griffins' heads are spiritual and national rather than individual. They are, in fact, improvements upon human faces as signifiers: in spite of their individuality, they represent commonalities among Jews that could otherwise not have been represented iconographically. Paradoxically, this shift takes place by making the visual signifier precisely a "bestial" transformation of the human visage, pointing to the very complex and nuanced dynamic involved in the employment of facial distortion in medieval Jewish illumination.

BLANK FACES: SUBVERTING POWER

If the depiction of Jews with the heads of griffins not only satisfies the prohibition of the representation of the human countenance but also serves to introduce a positive commentary on the spiritual nature and national characteristics of Jews, what, by way



FIGURE 15
Angel calling to Abraham at the binding of Isaac. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 15v (detail)

of contrast, do the featureless faces have to say about non-Jews? In order to answer this one needs to consider the images of blank-faced non-Jews (Egyptians; plate 15) in relationship with the other examples of featureless figures in the manuscript: those of angels and celestial bodies (figs. 15, 16). Do all three types of featureless images, apparently so different from one another, have anything in common?

Rabbinic and medieval Jewish sources emphasize unequivocally that angels, the sun and the moon, the stars and the planets exist entirely at God's discretion. They are described as servants with neither free will nor autonomy, whose every action is totally subordinate to God's direct command. Angels are often portrayed as contingent, ephemeral creatures, created anew each day and capable of performing only the single task assigned to them. The sun, moon, stars, and planets are imagined as having been willed into existence by God, placed in their courses, and firmly established so that they "do not change their appointed task."²⁵

The accentuation of the total dependence of these celestial beings on the will of God is clearly a response to the fact that both angels and the celestial bodies were worshipped as demigods or deities at various points in history, either by the Jews themselves or by their neighbors. The powerful emphasis that rabbinic sources place on their lack of will and autonomous power grows out of the fear that people might idolatrously supplicate or perhaps even venerate them, neglecting the worship of the one God who created them. This fear seems to have been justified: ancient and medieval Jewish magic is, in

fact, replete with the invocation of angels and the casting of horoscopes, and rabbinic literature is full of counterspells to limit or break the power of these potential demigods.²⁶

The representation of celestial forces with blank faces in the Birds' Head Haggadah is therefore a visual manifestation of the desire on the part of the manuscript's creators to break the power of these forces and effectively erase them by destroying their faces, a technique recommended in rabbinic literature.²⁷ It would have harmonized with the sentiments of the pietistic community in which the book likely originated. Moreover, it is an appropriate and desirable message to echo the emphasis of the haggadah text itself on the idea that redemption from Egypt came about "not by the hand of an angel... but by the Blessed Holy One alone, in glory."²⁸

If one understands the Jews in this manuscript to be represented as griffins, hybrid lion/eagle/human beings connected with holiness, the non-Jews, by contrast, are literally blanks—nothings. That non-Jews are represented with blank faces is perhaps intended as the expression of a wish for the controversion of the power of what the haggadah text calls the *goyim* 'asher be-shimkhah l'o yikr'au (the nations which do not call upon your name).²⁹ Because non-Jews were known in rabbinic literature as 'ovdei 'avodah zarah (devotees of foreign worship; that is, idolaters), a term that was easily euphemized by the acronym 'AKuM, for 'ovdei kokhavim ve-mazalot ("worshippers of stars and constellations"), the featureless faces represent an embodiment of the wish expressed in Psalm 115:8 that *kamo-hem yehiyu... kol 'asher boteah ba-hem*: "May all who trust in... [idolatrous powers] become like them," a text also included in the haggadah.³⁰ The non-Jews here are disempowered—literally "effaced" like the angels and celestial bodies, the putative objects of their idolatry.³¹

It is interesting to note that the angels, non-Jews, and celestial bodies are represented literally or exoterically in the Birds' Head Haggadah, whereas Jews are represented esoterically and symbolically. In the hierarchy of the manuscript, human (albeit blank) faces appertain only to beings that are "one-dimensional." There are angels, who are created for the purpose of executing a single task and being destroyed the evening of the day they perform it. There are the sun and moon, which are fixed and unchanging. And there are non-Jews, who—in the worldview of much of medieval Ashkenazic Jewry—lack Torah, and therefore, lack fullness and dimension to their lives. All of these have human faces in the sense of external, one-dimensional manifestations: what you see is what you get. Their visible apparent manifestation is their only reality: there is nothing beyond it. The Jews in the manuscript, however, are represented with countenances that reflect not their visible apparent reality, but their (cherubic) inner nature. Thus, Jews and non-Jews are clearly delineated.

To what extent does this characterization reflect the reality of how Jews viewed and behaved toward gentiles in Mainz around 1300? The Birds' Head Haggadah belongs



FIGURE 16
The gates of Paradise, with the Patriarchs and blank-faced angels, sun and moon, facial features added later. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 33r (detail)

to the realm of the private made manifest: it expresses, via a creative medium, certain sociotheological and historiosophical ideas about non-Jews for the consumption of an individual patron, a particular family, or, at most, a small community. In this context the iconography may do one of two things. It may reflect a xenophobic mindset—a view of Christians as inferior and defective—and a paranoia (based either in rhetoric or experience) that precipitated fearful and disdainful behavior toward them. On the other hand, it may simply “perform” an expected litany, comparable to the sorts of things Christian literature habitually says about “the Jews.” Just as Christians could refer liturgically to “*Judaei perfidi*” even as they enjoyed perfectly cordial relations with individual Jews, Jewish iconography may in fact simply reflect one mode in which Jews talked about non-Jews, without predetermining implications for their relationships with particular Christians.

What is depicted in the iconography of the Birds’ Head Haggadah, then, may represent a reaction to developments on a theological level within Christianity that came into Jewish consciousness via what Jews heard at the level of popular discourse, conversionary sermons, or mob rhetoric. Or, it may be due to internal developments: a surge of xenophobic pietism (also on theoretical or theosophical/historiosophical levels) within Judaism that amplified historically anti-gentile statements in the rabbinic tradition. This closing-in of Jewish society upon itself might have been the result of internal factors, or in response to conditions in the lived experience of Jews—particular encounters with Christians, religious coercion, economic pressure, violence, or a combination of these.

When the manuscript’s authorship presents an illumination of Pharaoh’s army under the flag of the Holy Roman Empire pursuing the Israelites, for instance, one need not necessarily conclude that this is a response to a particular persecution. It might represent a climate of pressure felt by the Jews without actual violence having been instigated. Or it might be a litany, a topos, a type-scene proclaiming the inevitable contemporary continuity of historical persecution that surfaces whenever the “historical” enemies of the Jews appear, in the spirit of the haggadah’s own statement, “More than one [nation] has attempted to destroy us, but the Holy Blessed One has saved us from their hand.”³²

Although the exact circumstances of the creation of the Birds’ Head Haggadah remain indeterminate, the tenor of the Jewish-Christian relationship in Mainz circa 1300 can, perhaps, be glimpsed via recourse to the many instances of legislative pressure and theological polemic of the High Middle Ages, and the repeated occurrences of mob violence in and around Mainz at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries. This history, however, must be considered with a critical eye and—following the work of Nirenberg and Elukin—with the strong caveat that what were recorded were inevitably the dramatic negative interactions. The daily neutral

and positive encounters remain relatively unsung. Accordingly throughout the ensuing analysis, I will be careful to insist that the sentiments seemingly conveyed in the iconography of the Birds' Head Haggadah be regarded as rhetorical expressions possessed of a reality in and of themselves—feelings experienced by the manuscript's authorship and understood by its audience. As such, they are worthy of consideration even in the absence of more concrete evidence for the particular historical circumstances that precipitated their expression.

2

Socioreligious Stratification

JEWS IN THE BIRDS' HEAD Haggadah are identified by their griffin-headed appearance, as opposed to the blank-faced non-Jewish figures. But because the griffin-headed figures are so highly individuated, one can detect differences not only between Jews and non-Jews, but among the Jewish figures themselves: hierarchies that are heralded by the presence or absence of additional physical and sartorial characteristics.

The depictions of Jews in the manuscript can be grouped into several broad categories. The principal characters are Jewish elders and patriarchs, revealed by the context (and confirmed by the handwritten captions) to be Moses, Aaron, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the leader of the seder, and various other mature male Israelites and Jews. All of them—even Esau—are given the heads of mature griffins, complete with blond beards, usually with ears (plate 4, top left, and first, third, fourth, and fifth figures at the bottom). Most of these figures also are equipped with manes of blond hair. Thus, even when shown with the heads of griffins these Jewish characters represent demonstrably northern European types, a detail notable in terms at least of the self-perception, and certainly of the self-presentation, of early fourteenth-century Ashkenazic Jewry. Other mature male Jews (not elders) appear beardless or lack the mammalian ears (first and second figures at the bottom right, second figure at the bottom left). For women and young male Jews, including servants, the illuminators imagined female and immature forms of the griffin, in both cases lacking beards (fig. 17; plate 17).¹

Further distinctions can be made among the figures on the basis of their headgear. Most mature male figures wear the *pileus cornutus*, a “peaked” (literally “horned”) hat,

FIGURE 17
Mazah preparation: mature male figure (with *Judenhut*), female figures in undecorated snoods, and a youth (hatless). Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 25v (detail)



also called the *Judenhut* (Jewish hat). Women display a variety of other types of head coverings. Those depicted making *mazah* on folio 25v are shown wearing utilitarian snoods, while those in the various seder table scenes sport more elaborate ornamented kerchiefs and turbans (plates 2, 19). Very young Jewish males, and some of the young servants, are represented bare-headed. This includes Isaac on the altar of the *'Akedah* (plate 7), the child or young man in the *mazah*-baking scene, the child or young man returning the *'Afikoman* (folio 29v), and some of the servants aiding in ritual actions (fols. 6v, 7v, 23r).²

The origin of the *pileus cornutus* is unclear. The wearing of a hat of this particular description was not required of Jews by any known law or local statute in early fourteenth-century Mainz; nonetheless, it is an identifying accoutrement of “Jewishness” in Christian visual culture of this period. Some scholars have identified the depiction of the *Judenhut* in Christian visual culture as a “sign of infamy,” but there are also relatively neutral uses of the hat simply as a means of identifying figures as Jewish. It appears in the case of Jewish patriarchs and prophets, and even, on rare occasions, on the head of the resurrected Jesus, simply indicating that he appears as a fellow Jew to his followers at Emmaus. It also comes to be used in visual culture created for Jews, testifying to the fact that by the fourteenth century the hat had become customary as an identifier of Jewishness, even among Jews, regardless of the manner in which it was troped in Christian art or society (fig. 18).³

Among the statutes promulgated by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 was the requirement that Jews wear a distinguishing mark as part of their clothing in order to limit intercourse (both social and sexual) between Jews and Christians. In Franco-Germany, dress and hairstyle—and, possibly, the wearing of some sort of Jewish hat (whether originally voluntary or imposed by some legislation is no longer known to us)—seem to have distinguished Jews sufficiently from their neighbors. The result was that the requirement of a separate, distinctive symbol for the identification of Jews was not enforced until the mid- to late fourteenth century, well after the date of the creation of the *haggadah*. At that time the wearing of a badge was imposed in some places (the badge was in the shape of a Jewish hat in at least one case), while the wearing of a hat was made compulsory in others.⁴



FIGURE 18
Judenhut in art made for Jews. *Kremser Ketubah*, Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Heb. 218, Austria 1392, fol. 1 (detail)



FIGURE 19
Bareheaded Joseph in Egypt. Birds'
Head Haggadah, fol. 12r (detail)

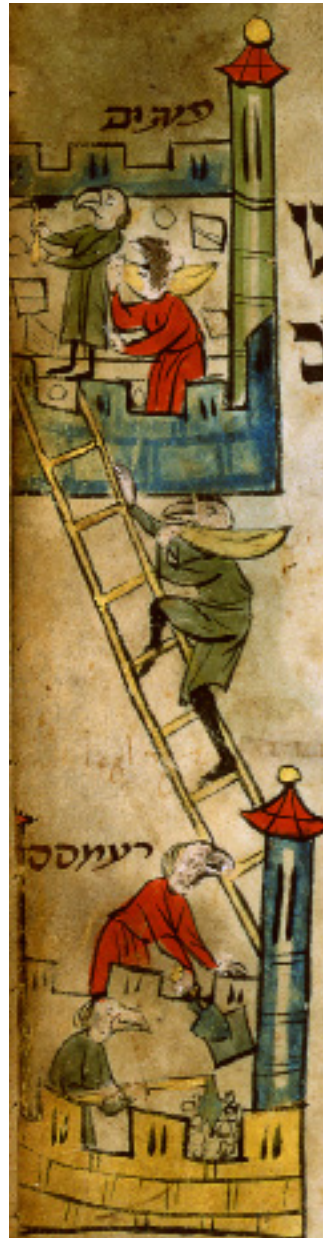


FIGURE 20 RIGHT
Bareheaded Israelite slaves in
Egypt. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol.
15r (detail)

Thus, when the Birds' Head Haggadah was illuminated, Jews seem not to have been distinguished by a badge of any kind, and none of the Jews depicted in the manuscript wears one. But what about the hat? Was the hat forced upon the Jews in the community represented in the Birds' Head Haggadah earlier than testified in the surviving legislation? Or was the manuscript created later than can be surmised on the basis of the style of the illuminations? Are the Jews depicted still wearing some sort of "traditional" hat of their own volition that had simply become a part of Jewish fashion? Might the illustrations not reflect contemporary reality at all? Might they, rather, be nostalgic or *retarditaire* in some aspects of style, including sartorial details? Whatever the case, the hat—even if not actually worn at the time of the manuscript's creation—might have been enforced recently enough to remain in memory, or might have been adopted wholesale from Christian visual culture. It need not serve as an accurate reflection of contemporary sartorial reality to nonetheless serve as an identifying sign par excellence.⁵

But with what, precisely, is the hat associated here? In Christian manuscripts, as I've noted, the hat can signify Jewishness. But in this manuscript Jewishness in a general sense is troped not via any particular sartorial detail, but by means of the griffin/cherub head. If all the griffin-headed figures are a priori Jewish, one needs to ask what

the hat comes to add. The *Judenhut*, like the griffin heads, explicitly identifies the adult males who wear it as Jews. But just as the griffin heads are an improvement over blank or otherwise distorted faces, the hats exceed their function as mere identifying signs. Head covering represents a commentary on the place of the various figures within the internal social hierarchy delineated in the illuminations, defining who, for the authorship, is a full member of the community and who exists along its fringes.

The authorship seems to have defined the central figures as adult Jewish males who fully participated in the religious culture and its observances, pious Jews wholly and completely within the community. It is they who find an archetypal iconographical form here, receiving the full complement of accoutrements of belonging: beard, ears, and hat. A measure of fidelity to social realism is reflected in the lack of the *Judenhut* in the case of women, servants, and minors. But its absence in the case of certain mature



male Jews differentiates them from the other, fully accoutred mature male figures, and requires pondering. There are three occurrences of such hatless mature males: the figure of Joseph in Egypt (fig. 19; plate 4, center left); those of the Jewish slaves building Pithom and Raamses (fig. 20; plate 6), and preparing their dough before the Exodus (plate 16); and finally, those of Datan and Aviram (fig. 22; plate 15). It is necessary, once again, to make an internal comparison. What is common among these hatless figures, and how are they differentiated from the figures wearing hats?⁶

Scripture depicts Joseph as having been uprooted from his home, being transplanted into an alien culture in which he “makes good,” and seemingly assimilating to that culture. Though he does not abandon his Israelite identity, he does not emphasize it. He doesn’t state that he is a Hebrew but rather that he was kidnapped from their land, and he conceals his identity even from his own brothers.⁷ Reading Genesis literally, then, Joseph can’t be seen, by any stretch of the imagination, as a pious, observant figure within the bosom of the community. Not quite a patriarch, he is excluded—both in liturgy and in illustration—from subsequent iterations of the “holy trinity” of the Fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as in this manuscript, where those Patriarchs are shown entering paradise without him (fig. 21; plate 22).

Likewise, in a literal reading of Exodus, the Israelite slaves, in experiencing forced subjugation to an alien culture, seem tremendously distant from God. At the opening of the book, they cry out, “and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God. God heard their moaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them” (Exodus 2:23–35). Yet the Israelites, for their part, take no notice of God. Indeed, when the whole tale is recounted in shorthand form in Deuteronomy as part of the First Fruits Declaration it has to be retold with a heavy interpolation of “God-consciousness.” The Israelites in Exodus 2 are clearly oblivious to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and in Exodus 6 they are resistant to God’s message, even when delivered by the greatest figures of their generation. Yet in the rose-tinted hindsight of Deuteronomy—the essential ritual recapitulation of historical memory—they are transformed into a properly

FIGURE 21

The Patriarchs at the gates of the Garden of Eden, fully accoutred in hats and beards. *Birds’ Head Haggadah*, fol. 33r (detail)

FIGURE 22

Datan and Aviram, bareheaded and beardless. *Birds’ Head Haggadah*, fol. 24v (detail)

pious and God-fearing community: “We cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression” (Deuteronomy 26:7).

Finally, Datan and Aviram are well known from scripture as miscreants and agitators. These men stand not only in contrast to, but at the precise opposite end of the spectrum from Moses and Aaron. Ultimately unredeemable, they are singled out by name from among all the party of the rebellious Korah, and their destruction is described in gruesome detail (Numbers 16:27). In this manuscript, Joseph, the slaves, and Datan and Aviram might each be characterized as “displaced Jews” of one kind or another. Shown in distinction from the fully accoutred (and hence completely central and normative) figures of the Patriarchs, Moses, Aaron, the elders, and the participants in the medieval seder, they are depicted hatless in implicit description (and perhaps in critique) of their comparative marginality. They don’t “merit” the hat which symbolizes full identification, but they are still distinguished as Jews by their griffin heads.

COUNTERSCRIPTURAL MIDRASH/COUNTERMIDRASHIC ICONOGRAPHY

Medieval Jews read the Bible through the lens of rabbinic interpretation. So while, from a strictly biblical literalist perspective, the iconographic critique (however subtle) of Joseph and the Israelite slaves may seem appropriate, from the perspective of medieval Jewish biblical exegesis, this intervention is highly problematic. Rabbinic tradition and its subsequent medieval recension depict Joseph and the Israelite slaves as rooted in the universe of mainstream observance—archetypes, in fact, of a sort of heroic piety. How could the authorship of the Birds’ Head Haggadah dare to critique those whom the rabbis had so unequivocally defended?

But the lens of rabbinic interpretation was not the only means of reading scripture available to medieval Jews. Another lens available to them was that of contemporary experience, which, though always present in the background, was deployed more infrequently and obliquely in actual exegesis. Along with the glimpses of quotidian realia afforded by medieval biblical and Talmudic commentary, there are also occasional sources that reveal the political perceptions and theological opinions of their authors. Rarely, however, do these depart from, conflict with, or even critique rabbinic tradition. The lens of contemporary experience was taken up by the authorship of the Birds’ Head Haggadah in response to the contrast between the depiction in rabbinic and some medieval textual sources of the unshakeable piety of Joseph and the enslaved Israelites and the various contradictions of this image, both in the literal scriptural text and in the lived experience of medieval Jews. Concerned about how real, contemporary medieval people might behave in circumstances of state servitude, the authorship exposed the rabbis as protesting too much, revealing the overdetermined nature of their beatification of Joseph and the enslaved Israelites.⁸

In rabbinic literature, Joseph is presented as the quintessence of righteousness in the face of the pressures of assimilation. He is an unwilling participant in an alien culture, the archetype of the *tinok she-nishbah*—the captive child—stolen from his father’s house. God arranges his entire odyssey with the intent of bringing his brothers and father down to Egypt so that the promise to Abraham at the Covenant between the Pieces (Genesis 15) can be fulfilled. All that Joseph does is directed toward that goal, and he serves as an advocate for his brothers when they approach him in their hour of need.⁹

The authorship of the Birds’ Head Haggadah was cognizant of this rabbinic portrayal, but it was also attuned to the position of Joseph’s contemporary analogues, those medieval Jews who were what might be called *krovim le-malkhut* (close to the government), helping to finance royal ventures or advise royal patrons throughout the Middle Ages, precursors of the later court Jews. Their participation in the courtly culture was surely enthusiastic: it afforded them many benefits as individuals and families. But these benefits came at the expense of the great duress of being the first to suffer should the monarch be displeased. One imagines that *krovim le-malkhut* were also ambivalent and conscience-riven, since the position straddled the fence between expedience and altruism. These Jews certainly advanced their own careers and status and reaped the benefits of a society that might otherwise have been closed to them. Yet, like Joseph, they were uniquely positioned to serve as indispensable advocates for their people.¹⁰

In the illumination on folio 12r, Joseph is shown “already in Egypt” (Exodus 1:5; plate 4 center left; see fig. 19), by way of contrast with his father and brothers, who descend to Egypt in the *bas-de-page*. A participant in an alien culture, he is depicted hatless. By denying him the *Judenhut*, the iconography effectively undermines the identification of Joseph, Pharaoh’s Hebrew adviser, as a completely normative, pious, or observant Jew. This may indicate ambivalence on the part of the authorship toward contemporary Jews who were close to the government, based on general suspicion or on particular and possibly local historical circumstances. Did such functionaries enter state service for personal aggrandizement? Or did they brave the fire for the sake of their fellow Jews? And while they were in the environment of the court, were they truly so scrupulous about *kashrut* or so punctilious concerning Sabbaths and holidays? Or did they perhaps allow their observance to lapse a bit? Yet while aspersions could be (and probably were) cast about the motivations and behavior of *krovim le-malkhut*, no one could deny that they were powerful and visible icons of the Jewish community in its dealings with the wider world. The iconography, therefore, stops short of reading Joseph, the archetypal *karov le-malkhut*, completely out of the Jewish community; it continues to depict him as griffin-headed.

Similarly, as described in rabbinic literature, the Jewish slaves in Egypt are exemplars of conservative piety, neither changing their Hebrew names, abandoning their Hebrew language, nor altering the particularities of their dress.¹¹ Yet the Jewish slaves shown

here are depicted as having shed the Jewish hats their ancestors wore when they went down to Egypt, just one folio previously (compare plates 4 and 6). The fact that they still sport griffin heads indicates that they are to be regarded as Jews, but it emphasizes that they are Jews subject to the pressures of state servitude. In contrast to Joseph and the *krovim le-malkhut*, they are indentured to, rather than employed by, the state. They are not enriched by their circumstances but suffer because of them. And they often feel not blessed but ignored, or even abandoned, by God. In the sociopolitical environment of the creation of this manuscript, it might have been difficult for Jews to maintain their observance at the highest level. They might have been tempted, for the sake of advancement (or merely of survival), to acculturate in matters of dress or language, the very things the midrash vociferously protests that they would never do. This illustration is a comment on the way in which the very insistence on unwavering Jewish identification and piety voiced in rabbinic literature makes it smack of disingenuousness. Whereas the rabbis, with an eye to moral instruction, propound an ideal with proscriptive intent, the illumination—based, perhaps, on the lived experience of the authorship and audience of this manuscript living life as the effective property of the emperor—reflects a perception of the social situation of early fourteenth-century Ashkenaz.¹²

It is hard to imagine a fourteenth-century Rhineland Jew explicitly questioning the piety of Joseph or the Israelites, since rabbinic sources were unequivocal on the matter. How, for instance, could a traditional Jew even refer to Joseph without calling him *ha-Zaddik* (the righteous one)? It was an intrinsic part of his title and, by extension, of his identity. How could anyone deny that the Jews had preserved their identity in Egypt? After all, they had emerged from Egypt as a people, in spite of the bitter experience of their servitude, and every subsequent Jewish festival was designated “in memory of the Exodus from Egypt.” Yet the depictions of the clean-shaven bareheaded figures of Joseph and of the Jews slaving in Egypt in the Birds’ Head Haggadah are indisputably (and consciously) counter-midrashic.

Rather than insisting that these illuminations are the work of hostile Christians or of unlettered Jewish artists, it is necessary to understand iconography as exegesis: commentary on the way scripture was read through the rabbinic lens, offered from the perspective of contemporary medieval experience. It seems to me that far from being ignorant of midrashic texts, the authorship of the Birds’ Head Haggadah read such texts carefully. Noticing the overdetermined tone of the texts, which insisted on the piety and conservatism of Jews who were in state service or enslaved, they glimpsed the underlying anxiety on the part of the rabbis concerning the possibility of normative observance under such straitened sociopolitical circumstances. And they may have had similar doubts when their own experiences as medieval Jews confirmed that people in such situations might act differently from the idealized rabbinic models of Joseph and the enslaved Israelites.

Countermidrashic or even counterscriptural rereading had strong precedents in medieval Ashkenaz. After the Crusade martyrdoms, for instance, some Jews had difficulty accepting the fact that, in scripture, the tale of the *'Akedah*, the binding of Isaac, ends with Isaac being saved at the last moment, when they had witnessed entire families committing suicide rather than submit to baptism, and “the heavens did not darken and the angels did not cry out.” In reaction, they composed liturgical poetry that effectively rewrote both scripture and midrash to assert that Isaac had been slain “for the sanctity of the [divine] Name” like children in their own communities.¹³

It is now widely acknowledged that in contrast to long-held views of the Middle Ages as the “Age of Faith,” medieval Christians were faced with crises of belief stemming from a variety of sources. Likewise, there were intellectual, social, and political factors wearing down the faith and observance of Jews. Jews in Mainz—under Rudolf of Habsburg (1273–1291) and as confirmed by Louis the Bavarian (1314–1347) in 1343 and Charles IV (1346–1378) in 1347—were regarded as slaves in the Roman legal sense; that is, the property of the Imperium in matters relating to both their body and their property, both of which were, as a result, technically under the protection of the Imperium. Living in relationship to monarchs who owned them in one way or another, whether as *krovim le-malkhut* or as *servi camerae Regis, tanquam servi*, or *Judaei “nostri,”* Jews such as those who commissioned the Birds’ Head Haggadah may have found it difficult to maintain their observance. Though hardship can in some senses serve to consolidate identity, it seems from the way Joseph and the Israelite slaves are depicted in the manuscript that there was also a cognizance that it was difficult to completely preserve one’s religious identity and observance in the face of, in the one case, the temptations of the courtly life, and, in the other, the deprivations of status and crushing taxation. Exposed to (perhaps even personally faced with) such dilemmas, the patrons of this manuscript commissioned iconography that testifies to the difficulty of preserving distinctive national identity and scrupulous levels of religious observance. They gave voice to their anxiety through the illustrations but ultimately reasserted the essential Jewishness of those whose observance may have lapsed, or of those whose circumstances may have placed them on the periphery—rather than in the bosom—of the community.¹⁴

EMBRACING THOSE WHOM THE RABBIS CONDEMNED

A final category of displaced Jews in high medieval society reflected in the manuscript is that of individuals who succumbed to the various opportunities for social and economic advancement that accrued with conversion to Christianity. There were, no doubt, some sincere converts in medieval Ashkenaz, but the critique in the Birds’ Head Haggadah is of those who “go over to the other side” for preferment and material gain, as represented by Datan and Aviram. One might have thought that the manuscript’s physical margin

separating Jew from non-Jew in the illumination of the Egyptians pursuing the Israelites was the only necessary demarcation of the difference of status of those groups: a literally uncrossable divide. But by placing obviously Jewish figures in the Egyptian camp the illumination raises what was a very real question for medieval Ashkenazic Jewry: If a Jew deliberately—even maliciously—“goes over to the other side,” is he still a Jew? The answer, encapsulated in the illumination of Datan and Aviram as mature male figures with “Jewish” features but without the full identification provided by the hat, is that even when Jews appear with the Egyptians they remain recognizable as Jews. Their identity is inescapable and interminable (see fig. 22).

Datan and Aviram do not have the status of captive children, like Joseph, nor were they indentured against their will, like the Israelite slaves. Rather, they willingly went over to the enemy side in order to accrue individual gain and to settle personal scores. They represent a category of displaced Jews painfully familiar in the medieval community: *mumarim* or *meshumadim*, Jews who converted to Christianity for material gain or revenge, or even occasionally out of conviction, but who often could turn against, inform upon, or slander their parent community. Such defections were especially rife at times of pressure, such as ritual murder or host desecration accusations against the Jews. To the Birds’ Head Haggadah authorship, then, it was obvious that these Jews should be denied the identifying sign of the *Judenhut*. But they are still depicted with the griffin-headed features that distinguish Jews, in accordance with the principle that *’af’al pi shehoteh Yisra’el hu*: in spite of the fact that a Jew may sin (and in the Middle Ages this was often explicitly interpreted as conversion to Christianity), halakhically—according to Jewish law—he remains a Jew.¹⁵

A SIGN OF REDEMPTION

The symbolism of the *Judenhut* ranged from neutral to (more usually) negative in the majority culture at this time and place. It was imposed upon the Jews as an identifying sign against their will. But in the Birds’ Head Haggadah the hat’s negative valence is transformed into an explicit sign of identity, and in fact of redemption for the Jewish audience. All Jews who are positive models are supplied with one; all Jews who are more ambiguous models are denied one. All Jews who are redeemed receive one; all Jews who are as yet unredeemed lack one. All Jews who are staunchly part of the community are provided with one; all Jews who are somehow on the fringes of the community are refused one. In the Birds’ Head Haggadah, commonality among Jews is expressed by the symbol of the griffin heads. Accordingly, the representation or omission of the *Judenhut* is a useful device to indicate more subtle internal distinctions among Jews and to comment upon them. The *Judenhut* is semiotically independent of the griffin heads: if the griffin heads are what implicitly unifies the Jews depicted in this manuscript, it is

the *Judenhut* that explicitly differentiates among them. And if the hats were, in fact, a negative sign in the majority context, they here become an ironic sign of redeemedness, an assertion that Jews possess a common historical experience and a common destiny. In such a circumstance, it would be as if Jews were saying to Christians, “You have given us an external sign of identification. Although we may not be happy about it, it is useful to us in iconography, which depends on such externals to ‘mark’ certain characters and thus to tell the story.” This, of course, begs the question of whether the use of the *Judenhut* is a self-consciously ironic sign or if its irony is only in the eye of the beholder.

This nexus of adoption and adaptation, as I have observed, characterizes the major dilemma of Jewish visual culture in the Middle Ages. The stakes were highest and the adaptation most subtle when iconography was borrowed in order to express the abstract concepts at the heart of the dispute between Judaism and Christianity: those issues that most differentiated between Jews and Christians, like the election of Israel, or the ineluctability of Jewish uniqueness and the irreducible alterity between Jews and non-Jews. In such cases, there might be a wholesale appropriation, with no formal change at all, of an iconographic element that had a particular range of conventional meanings in the majority culture. When such an element was used in a Jewish manuscript, it could undergo a total reconceptualization, taking on a new constellation of meanings, some of which were the very antithesis of those common in the wider culture. The use of the *Judenhut* in the Birds’ Head Haggadah is a significant example of this phenomenon.¹⁶

AWAY FROM A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION

It is widely acknowledged that the so-called zoocephalic phenomenon in world art arises from a panoply of considerations, and that the animal-headed figures depicted by Egyptian, Assyrian, Hindu, Chinese, and Christian, Pre-Columbian, and Mesoamerican artists serve various functions, depending on their particular context, even within the same culture. One of the failures of imagination on the part of most studies of the phenomenon in Jewish visual culture is that investigators feel compelled to attempt to impose a single solution upon the problem of the entire genre: halakhic, sociological, or even “anti-semitic.” I am skeptical as to whether one key will suffice for all the occurrences of zoocephalic figures. By establishing how the approaches of the Birds’ Head Haggadah to the problem of depicting human features are varied, even on a single page, and by demonstrating that each choice the authorship made has inherent meaning in the particular context of the manuscript, I have highlighted the fact that the halakhic issues concerning the replacement of human heads with those of griffins are extremely nuanced. If the approaches employed within a single manuscript are so nuanced, how much more so must approaches vary in each and every other manuscript in which zoocephalism figures.

Perhaps one cannot speak of a genre at all. One can certainly observe that a number of manuscripts from medieval Ashkenaz exhibit a variety of ways of avoiding the depiction of the human face. But while they may be consistent in their intention to satisfy halakhah by obscuring the face, and while they do evince some commonality of iconographic method, I do not detect any obvious consistency of meaning for the chosen iconography. The contextual objective of each manuscript (beyond halakhic considerations) differs from every other. The illuminator of the Regensburg Pentateuch, for instance, was comfortable depicting human faces, but angels are shown with the heads of birds (see folio 18v, for example). The authorship of the Tripartite Mahzor, by way of contrast, seems to have had a particular horror of depicting women's faces. In the illuminations, men are depicted with human heads, but women's features are replaced by those of various identifiable animals. The inconsistent treatment of human features makes it clear that the use of these animal heads is intended to accomplish far more than merely satisfy the halakhic mandate to avoid the depiction of the human face, but what, exactly, that was, remains elusive. The more specific dimensions of the authorship's rationale have yet to be explored through a complete analysis of the overall conceptual themes of each manuscript employing zoocephalism.¹⁷

The idea that the instances of the zoocephalic phenomenon must constitute a genre arises from the assumption that the study of Jewish visual culture must follow the patterns of the study of Christian visual culture, in which it has, until recently, been fashionable to speak of conventions and genres. But there has been a shift in the understanding of Christian visual culture, and art historians now speak of two strata of iconographic process. On the one hand, there were some fairly strict conventions of narrative iconography, and even beyond that iconography, everything from the color to the disposition of an image was deemed to convey a specific theological message. On the other hand, in the relationship between patron and illuminator, there was considerable latitude, even within the parameters of convention. Artists could be directed by patrons to select from and juxtapose various conventions in order to emphasize a specific, often personally or contextually relevant, intellectual conception. It is the arrangement of often predetermined conventions that gives life and vibrancy to particular works of medieval art, and that often makes otherwise conventional images speak radical or subversive messages in their new and particular contexts.¹⁸

In medieval Jewish visual culture there were few if any iconographic conventions. The main problem of medieval Jewish visual culture was to grapple with interpreting the text through the common iconography of the period and place. Rather than being a function of the patron-artist relationship, the central intellectual program of medieval Jewish visual culture was radical reinterpretation. And on those occasions when it utilized motifs that were recognizably "Christian," Jewish visual culture had to retrofit such

motifs—like the *Judenhut*, for instance—to make them say things often diametrically opposed to their messages in their original context. The forging of medieval Jewish iconography was not simply a function of reproducing the conventions of a theoretical ancient model now lost, nor a matter of copying well versus copying incompetently. It was a revolutionary and creative exegetical enterprise in and of itself, the tools of which were cutting, pasting, and juxtaposition.

It is clear that many of the patrons of the Ashkenazic zoocephalic manuscripts, though they wished to avoid the representation of the human face, felt comfortable in substituting animal faces for human ones. In the case of the Birds' Head Haggadah, I have demonstrated how the choice of griffin reflects on Jewish self-image, and how it contrasts with the solution used in the case of non-Jews. I have shown, furthermore, how hierarchical distinctions are represented within the Jewish community depicted in the manuscript. The particular use of griffins' heads in combination with various headgear tropes is unique to this manuscript and to its historical context. It may have been the artists' own way of dealing with the prohibition and highlighting distinctions between Jews and non-Jews and among the Jews depicted. It may represent a solution emerging from the dialectic among the illuminators, the patrons, and local rabbinic authorities—or it may have been some combination of both.

Any attempt at a single, comprehensive solution to the problem of the “genre”—even one less tendentious than Mellinkoff's theory of a collaboration between anti-semitic artists and oblivious patrons—will simply not suffice to explain the individual impulses behind facial distortions in discrete manuscripts. Each manuscript needs to be judged on its own terms, because each, like the Birds' Head Haggadah, has a particular story to tell. Such a project of complete contextual analysis is a desideratum for all the Ashkenazic manuscripts employing zoocephalism. With individual analysis, the focus will shift from the obvious question of what makes these manuscripts similar to the more subtle question of what their differences mean—how the varying ways in which the authorships chose to satisfy the halakhah reflect individual or communal agendas.

3

Narrative Sequence

EVEN A CURSORY LOOK AT the Birds' Head Haggadah reveals many apparent problems in the narrative sequence of its illustrations, as well as any number of other seeming iconographic eccentricities. Often, in fact, the singularity of the manuscript's iconography has moved scholars to pronounce that certain illustrations were created or copied in error. Some have even completely denied the obvious identification of the figures—reading against the logic of their placement and their labeling by subsequent owners—in order to assure that what they deem “impossible” is not represented.

In the text volume accompanying the 1965 facsimile of the manuscript, the most recent full-scale treatment of the iconography, Bezalel Narkiss made two assumptions about the illuminations. First, he presupposed that there was a “proper” sequence of scenes, paralleling the order of the text of Exodus. Second, he took for granted that the illuminations should illustrate the text in a direct, literal manner, labeling any failure to do so a deviation, corruption, or miscopying from a theoretical “lost model.” The existence of such a model was predicated upon Narkiss's judgment that the artist of this manuscript was “accomplished in the craft of copying rather than in artistic invention.” Because he found it impossible that such a “not so highly accomplished artist...could have invented such a complicated iconographical programme,” Narkiss invented a lost model and asserted that “when the artist fails to correlate the illustration precisely with the text, [it is] clearly on account of a failure to understand his model correctly.” In the lost model, he implied, the illustrations would have followed the “expected” sequence without the “errors” found in the Birds' Head Haggadah.¹

Because he believed that the iconography should represent a linear and literal sequence, it is unsurprising that Narkiss described the scenes as configured in the manuscript as chaotic, “arbitrary, and not all...essential for an abridged Exodus cycle.”² My own analysis of the manuscript does not lead me to such a conclusion. In light of the work of Verkerk and others, I do not feel constrained to regard the illuminations as necessarily attempting to convey an “abridged Exodus cycle” at all; I wish, rather, to allow them to present themselves in the configuration in which the authorship has presented them to us. Viewed in situ, they reveal themselves as constituting several interrelated cycles of political, social, and theological commentary and polemic. Taken together, they represent the comprehensive virtual metanarrative of Jewish collective memory, *sippur yezi'at Mizrayim*, rather than a primitive, reductionist, or literal rendering of the Exodus text.

In what follows I will attempt to make better sense of the iconography, and to posit some sense of purpose and intentionality to the manuscript. I believe the arrangement of the illustrations represents the singular genius of its particular authorship. I find the relationship the authorship had with the narrative motifs it selected to be the most compelling aspect of the manuscript's construction, regardless of their ultimate origin. I believe that it is specifically the lack of certain scenes and the inclusion of others — often precisely the scenes that have been previously noted as “uncommon” or the result of the “individual taste of the artist” — that makes the manuscript a fresh, vibrant, individual, and conceptually sophisticated intellectual production, regardless of its aesthetic merits or the lack thereof.³

In revisiting the Birds' Head Haggadah, I am moved to consider what previous historians of Jewish visual culture supposed the people who commissioned this manuscript thought they were receiving. Were the patrons completely blind to the inconsistencies, unconcerned about receiving a manuscript in which a panoply of bizarre bird-headed creatures stumbled through a confused and inconsistent narrative sequence? I wonder also whether all the apparent inconsistencies noted by previous scholars are, in fact, problems at all; is the sequence truly confused, or was it simply misunderstood — not by the authorship, but by the latter-day investigators?

NARRATIVE CLUSTERS AND STRANDS: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Excluding the illuminations of the seder ritual, I find three fairly distinct clusters of narrative iconography in the Birds' Head Haggadah. These include (1) a group of illustrations relating to narratives of the prehistory of the Exodus, the central focus of which I understand to be the interwovenness of typological and historical antecedents; (2) a second series, illustrating the *piyyut* (liturgical poem) *Dayyenu*, which consists of depictions of the narratives of the Exodus and the desert wandering of the Israelites, and in which I see an emphasis on covenant/redemption; and (3) a final cluster of illuminations revolving around the preparation of *mazah*, the subject matter of which I would describe as protest/clarification. There is, furthermore, one pervasive strand of narrative iconography interwoven within these other clusters. It concerns the Passover sacrifice/observance, seen from five distinct historical perspectives, the main theme of which, it seems to me, is metahistoricity.⁴

I now turn to each sequence of illuminations in each cluster along with their overlapping elements. I hope to demonstrate how the strand of five Passovers is integrated throughout the work, connecting the clusters and binding the entire iconography together as a conceptual whole.

FIGURE 23
Jacob (right) and Esau (left). Birds'
Head Haggadah, fol. 12r (detail)



THE EXODUS PREHISTORY CLUSTER

Jacob and Esau: Etiology

The cluster of the prehistory of the Exodus contains images that represent both “historical” narrative and typological antecedents. The cluster begins with the depiction of two patriarchal figures wearing *Judenhüte* seated on small hillocks within roofed tabernacles, on folio 12r (plate 4). An early owner of the manuscript has labeled the formidable blond-bearded figure on the left Esau, and his dwelling, Mount Seir. The abode of the smaller figure, blond yet beardless, on the right is labeled “The Tent of Jacob,” its eponymous inhabitant left unlabeled (fig. 23). Jaffé writes that the illustrations “may represent Abraham and Isaac, who are both mentioned in the text.” The inscriptions “may be errors by a later owner, though Jacob and Esau are also mentioned on the page.” Narkiss compounds the mystery: “Folio 12r depicts Jacob and Esau, or perhaps Abraham and Isaac, seated in their dwelling places.”⁵

It is true that the name of Abraham appears in the text of the previous folio, and that this folio mentions Isaac. But the central motif of the text on the page is the fate of Isaac’s two children as a prelude to the account of the Egyptian enslavement, as is clearly articulated in the text accompanying the images: “And to Isaac I will give Jacob and Esau. And to Esau I will give Mt. Seir as an inheritance. And Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.”⁶ (The *bas-de-page* depicts the descent of Jacob and his sons into Egypt.)

The identification of these figures as Abraham and Isaac is not only counterintuitive in terms of both the textual and iconographic context of the page; it also forces one to regard the corroborating inscriptions of the manuscripts’ early owner as erroneous. Since both the text on the page and the early inscriptions point clearly to the fact that these figures represent Jacob and Esau, why did Jaffé and Narkiss designate them as Abraham

and Isaac? Both scholars seem to have shared the presumption of a lost model in which (for unspecified reasons) images of Abraham and Isaac, but not of Jacob and Esau, would have figured, even though Jacob and Esau are mentioned in the haggadah text. An illustration of Jacob and Esau at this juncture would thus not fit into the “expected” range of possible illuminations in that theoretical lost model and so would be an “impossible” iconography. This reasoning is, of course, circular. A tradition is invented and declared lost, and then the iconography in the “recension” is presumed to be mislabeled because it does not conform to that tradition even though there is textual justification for the label it bears.⁷

Whomever the authorship intended to represent, the captions make it clear that those who received and passed down the manuscript understood the figures to represent Jacob and Esau. But the corroboration for an identification of the figures as Jacob and Esau does not come from the inscriptions alone. That these figures are depicted iconically rather than as part of a narrative is the best clue to their identity. While the tales of Genesis are about God’s relationship with humanity and, eventually, with a single, chosen family, Exodus is about what happens when that chosen family meets—for the first time and on a large scale—the Other, and is itself “othered” by reason of its enslavement. In short, it is about Jews and others; consequently, the cycle starts with the iconic images of Jacob and Esau—a parallel with or a response to Christian images of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga*. Just as Christians configured the Jewish-Christian relationship in terms of the dispute between the personifications of the Church and the Synagogue, Jews troped that conversation in the guise of the conflict between the third patriarch and his twin. For medieval Ashkenazic Jews, Jacob was Israel par excellence, and Esau was Edom—pagan and ultimately Christian Rome. Perhaps what was confusing to Narkiss and Jaffé was the fact that Esau, the proto-Christian, is wearing a *Judenhut* here. But the fact that Esau is troped as a Jew here speaks to a much more nuanced view of the common origins of Jews and Christians on the part of the Birds’ Head authorship than the view of Jews and Christians generated by the iconography of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga*. Esau is related to, and thus, by extension, has a significant continuing relationship with Jacob, whereas *Synagoga* is utterly alien to and divorced from *Ecclesia*.⁸

Given the emphasis in this haggadah on the relationship between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors, it is essential to read these, the very first “historical” figures depicted in the manuscript, as Jacob and Esau. The split between the two—Esau receiving a dwelling place and Jacob going down to Egypt—is, in the haggadah, as in medieval Jewish consciousness, an etiology of the parting of the ways between Jews and Christians, wherein one road leads to establishment and temporal dominance, and the other to wandering and exile.⁹

FIGURE 24
 Jacob (bottom far left) and six sons
 descending to Egypt, where Joseph
 dwells (upper left). Birds' Head Hag-
 gadah, fol. 12r (detail)



Descent into Egypt/Israelite Slavery: A Typology of Two Models of Exile

Just as the iconic depiction of Jacob and Esau is an etiology of the parting of the ways between Jews and Christians, the *bas-de-page* illustration of Jacob and his sons going down into Egypt is a visual etiology of the exile in which the medieval Jewish viewers of the illuminations regarded themselves as living. In this and the following illumination, on folio 15r, two models of what it might mean to be “in Egypt” are represented. Joseph, the one “close to the government,” is represented here, and on folio 15r, the alternative is shown: Jews as slaves, building the cities of Pithom and Raamses for their masters (see fig. 20; plate 6). How could these two models have failed to elicit a range of responses in an early fourteenth-century audience in Ashkenaz—from glimmers of recognition to full-blown identification? As I have shown, the beardlessness and hatlessness in the case of both Joseph and the slaves indicate that both figures represent, in different keys, images of displacement or alienation.

Moses and Aaron: A Typology of Prayer in the “Past Continuous”

In contrast to these semi-ambivalent images of displacement or alienation, folio 15v presents two images of connection and covenant (plate 7). At the upper right are two figures kneeling in prayer below an amorphous blue cloud intended to represent the Divine Presence (as it does on folios 22v, 23r, and 33r). This scene seems, at first glance, to illustrate Exodus 2:23: “The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God.” The two figures are perhaps intended as a shorthand representation of the cry of the entire Israelite people. But

Exodus 2:23 is difficult to represent visually; in that verse, the Israelites certainly do not cry out directly to God. They simply groan in inarticulate pain under the bondage, and their cry for help ascends to God.¹⁰

Moreover, the haggadah text itself is based not on the “actual” Exodus story, but on the First Fruits Declaration in Deuteronomy 26:1–10, which institutionalizes the Exodus as a nexus of national collective memory. So, it is Deuteronomy 26:7 that appears directly next to the figures on the page: “We cried to the LORD the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression.” Here, the cry of the Israelites is imagined as a deliberate, theistically oriented prayer rather than the general, involuntary, and undirected groan of Exodus 2:23, and the Exodus text appears only afterward, as the exegetical prooftext for the Deuteronomy text more directly accompanying the images.

But if the illumination was really intended to illustrate Deuteronomy 26:7, one might have expected an illustration of the Israelite slaves, bareheaded as in the previous illumination (see fig. 20; plate 6), crying out to God amid their bricks and mortar. By way of contrast, the figures represented here are mature males, “fully equipped” with griffin ears, beards, and hats. They are labeled Moses and Aaron by a later hand (fig. 25). If the illumination literally illustrates the Israelites crying to God, the designation of these figures as Moses and Aaron seems problematic, for when the Israelites’ cry goes up to God in the Exodus narrative, Moses, at least, is far away, “tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian,” in the wilderness (Exodus 3:1). Yet, given the distinguished appearance of the figures and their divergence from the depiction of the enslaved Israelites in the manuscript, their designation, per the caption, as Moses and Aaron cannot be discounted. The image should be seen, rather, as making a theological point apprehended by the later captioner.

Deuteronomy 26:7 describes a cry to God in the historical past—an event that had occurred and that had precipitated the redemption of the Israelites at the time of the Egyptian slavery. The authorship chose to illustrate a cry going up to God (as represented by the cloud indicating the divine presence), but not the one in the historical past, as depicted in the Deuteronomy verse. Although the Deuteronomy verse is the one that accompanies the illumination, I believe that the designation of these figures as Moses and Aaron indicates that another verse actually underlies the depiction. The phenomenon of one verse accompanying a particular iconography, while another underlies it,



FIGURE 25
Moses (right) and Aaron (left) kneel in supplication before the Divine Presence manifest in the cloud. Birds’ Head Haggadah, fol. 15v (detail)

nuancing it more subtly and shifting its theology, is common both in Jewish textuality and in visual culture. Often, as I have demonstrated, a text that explicitly accompanies a representation may hint at a deeper or even a contravening meaning. Or, as in this case, a representation that ostensibly illustrates one text may simultaneously serve for another, deepening the range of meaning inherent in both texts as well as in the illustration.¹¹ The presence of Moses and Aaron indicates that the underlying verses here are those of Psalm 99:6–8, where another cry to God—one that better conforms to the iconography of the illumination, and, it seems to me, the theological intention of the authorship—is described: “Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel, among those who call on his name—would call to the LORD and he would answer them. He would speak to them in a pillar of cloud; they obeyed his decrees,¹² and a law he gave them. O LORD our God, You answered them; You were a forgiving God for them, but You exacted retribution for their misdeeds.”¹³ This is a complex and interesting series of verses, which serves as a subtext for the illuminations on the page. Although the text on the page speaks of a historical past, the grammar of the Psalm verse (“Moses and Aaron...would call out to the LORD and he would answer them”) is couched in the past continuous. In other words, although the verse describes past action, it reads in the present tense, literally: “Moses and Aaron...*call out* to the LORD and *he will* answer them.”¹⁴ Combined with the fact that the illumination contains an explicit representation of the divine presence in a cloud, as directly indicated by the Psalm verse, one can identify the iconography as representing continuous access to the divine, imminent redemption ever present—albeit in the background—of history, and needing only to be invoked in order to be manifested.

In this, it forms a parallel with the *bas-de-page* illustration of the *’Akedah*, the binding of Isaac. Abraham and Isaac were important for high medieval Ashkenazic Jewry not only as iconic figures (the Patriarchs) but as part of an iconic narrative: the *’Akedah*. As I have already noted, medieval Ashkenazic Jews reinterpreted the *’Akedah* narrative as a mirror of their own communal martyrdom, so fresh in their communal memory. The idea that Abraham was a man called upon to slaughter his own son resonated deeply with them both in terms of history and typology. And the fact that God takes note of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son becomes the basis of a covenant between God and Israel. Whenever Israel (Isaac’s descendants) sin and deserve punishment, God recalls the binding of Isaac as if Abraham had actually fulfilled his intention—sacrificing and burning him, reducing him to ashes on the altar. The narrative is elevated to an iconic and eternal status. So while the figures are shown as engaged in action rather than as static images, the narrative occurs in what I will call the “past continuous”—a past that constantly plays itself out in historical memory, becoming manifest at each moment in which Jews



FIGURE 26
The Binding of Isaac (text: “And God heard their moaning . . . and remembered His Covenant with Abraham.”—Ex. 2:24). Birds’ Head Haggadah, fol. 15v (detail)

require and evoke its presence. It is thus particularly apropos that the *‘Akedah*, although not mentioned explicitly in the text of the haggadah, should appear in the illustration in this manuscript (fig. 26; see plate 7, bottom).¹⁵

There is a clear message of comfort extrapolated by Jews in early fourteenth-century Mainz from the narrative of the *‘Akedah*, and bolstered by Psalm 99’s promise of continuous redemption. It forms the basis of the illustrations of both texts on this folio, each featuring the appearance of the divine presence in a cloud: just as God answered their ancestors (Abraham and Isaac on Moriah, and Moses and Aaron “among his priests”), so will God continue to answer the pleas of Jews in times of distress. God will be moved to act in the merit of the pious relationship they maintain with Him: “They obeyed his decrees [or, “were faithful witnesses”], and a law he gave to them.”

THE SUBTEXT OF FOLIO 15V AS A KEY TO THE MANUSCRIPT

Psalm 99:8b, “You were a forgiving God for them, but You exacted retribution for their misdeeds,” is generally understood by medieval commentators to refer to the fact that although God is always the protector and forgiver of the Children of Israel, he is also the source of retribution (*nokem*), the one who metes out retribution (*nekamah*) upon them for their misdeeds (*‘alilot* can also mean “slanders”). But the verse can also be creatively read as asserting that God avenges the Jews for slanders committed against them.¹⁶ The words *‘alilot* and *nekamah* are profoundly evocative in the context of the iconographic and textual emphases of the Birds’ Head Haggadah. In fact, they might, without exaggeration, be described as key words to themes of its iconography. It is fitting that the iconographic themes of the manuscript are heralded by a text that is not explicit on the page but implicit in the illumination, falling squarely within the tradition of concealment and disclosure that I have described as characterizing medieval Jewish visual culture.¹⁷

The Birds' Head Haggadah was, in fact, created against a backdrop of *'alilot*—slanders, these perpetrated against the Jews by their neighbors in early fourteenth-century Ashkenaz—and it responds to them in its iconography, as I shall demonstrate. It furthermore contains a curious textual variant expressing a very strong and unprecedented expression of the desire for *nekamah* (revenge). Finally, its ultimate theme is that of redemption. The image of God as *nos'eh*, not only in the sense of being forbearing but of literally bearing the Jews to the safety of redemption, per Exodus 19:4 (“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you [*'es'ah*, from the same root as *nos'eh*] on eagles' wings and brought you to Me”), is crucial both to the understanding of the manuscript as a whole and to the understanding of the griffin-headed figures.

Thus, the figures of “Moses” and “Aaron,” addressing a fervent prayer to God, who goes before them in the pillar of cloud, are not mislabeled. They represent a double entendre and a play between the Deuteronomy text on the page and the inherent subtext of Psalm 99. They are a reminder of the continuing divine providence the contemporary audience of this manuscript understood to be promised to them. They provide reassurance that God will defend them as he did their ancestors.

THE EXODUS PREHISTORY CLUSTER: A SUMMARY

Let me sum up the conceptual progression of the Exodus prehistory cluster: The first illumination of the cluster, Esau and Jacob, on folio 12r (see fig. 23; plate 4, top), harkens back to the legendary origin of Jewish/Christian difference and animosity, and of the divergence of the “inheritance” of Jews and non-Jews, their “brothers.” Esau receives temporal power and (temporary) dominion. Jacob, by contrast, undergoes exile and suffering. This experience, however, ultimately leads to spiritual development, reaffirmation of the Covenant at Sinai, and finally, in the fullness of days, to temporal dominion over Esau. At that ultimate point in history, Jacob finally reaps the material and spiritual blessings invoked by Isaac. The representation of Jacob and Esau, thus, presents medieval Jewish viewers with an etiology of their situation and with an implicitly hopeful message about the future.¹⁸

The next two illuminations, the descent of the Israelites to join Joseph in Egypt on folio 12r (see fig. 24; plate 4, bottom), and the enslaved Israelites on folio 15r (see fig. 20; plate 6), represent typological antecedents for two different models of life in exile—state service and state servitude—both of which were known by or experienced to one degree or another by the original receptive audience.

The third illumination, that of Moses and Aaron at prayer on folio 15v (see fig. 25 and plate 7, top right) represents a typological antecedent for the efficacy of prayer and supplication to God even in the midst of suffering foreordained by God. It is a reassurance

to the medieval viewer that though the particular salvation depicted here is “past,” it is also “continuous”; it will, in other words, occur in the future just as it always has. It is a function not of circumstances or deeds alone, but of the continuing covenantal relationship with divinity.

Finally, the illumination of the *‘Akedah* at the bottom of folio 15v (see fig. 26; plate 7, bottom) serves a dual purpose, both ending the Exodus prehistory cluster and beginning what I will identify as the *Qorban Pessah* (Passover sacrifice) strand. It represents another kind of witness to the eternity of God’s covenant in spite of trying circumstances, as emphasized in the Rosh HaShanah liturgy: “May You mercifully remember today the binding of Isaac for the sake of his offspring.”¹⁹

THE DAYYENU CLUSTER: COVENANTAL AND REDEMPTIVE POLEMICS

The cluster of illuminations appearing in the *bas-de-page* on folios 21r–23r (plates 10–14) accompanies and is related to the events described in the *piyyut Dayyenu*. The images in this series evoke the concept of the eternity and unconditionality of *brit* (covenant), implicitly supporting the idea of God’s continuing relationship with the Children of Israel in spite of their sins. Additionally, they champion the Jewish idea of salvation through unconditional covenant over the Christian paradigm of salvation through grace as represented by the eucharist and the sacrifice of the mass.

The cluster opens and closes with images evoking Israel’s covenantal relationship with God. The first illustration, on folio 21r, is of *Pessah Mizrayim*, the Passover sacrifice in Egypt, the haste of the sacrifice, per Exodus 12:11, indicated by the billowing of the cloak of the sacrificing figure over his shoulder (fig. 27; plate 10). *Pessah Mizrayim* is associated, as shall be seen, with the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision. The final illustration, on folio 23r, represents *Mattan Torah*, the Giving of the Torah, and the renewal of *Brit Horev*, the Covenant at Sinai (see fig. 30; plate 14, left). In between, one finds two examples of the ways in which the divine covenant with Israel moves God to miraculously alter the course of nature in order to save and provide for the Israelites, by splitting the Sea of Reeds (plate 11) and raining down manna from heaven (see fig. 32; plate 13). And in the center of the cluster, framed by these two salutary examples, there is a scene that—seemingly incongruously—records the “murmurings” or complaining of the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness (fig. 28; plate 12).

The illumination of the Passover sacrifice (Exodus 12:1–12) on folio 21r acts as a sort of shorthand for the first four verses of *Dayyenu*: “If God had freed us from Egypt, but had not...executed judgment on the Egyptians...executed judgment upon their gods...slain their firstborn, it would have been enough.”²⁰ It was the sacrifice that made it possible for the Israelites to leave Egypt; the act that signified the culmination of the

FIGURE 27
Pessah Mizrayim—the Passover
 sacrifice in Egypt. Birds' Head Hagga-
 dah, fol. 21r (detail)



FIGURE 28
 Three Israelites (at right) complain to
 Moses (far left). Birds' Head Haggadah,
 fol. 22r (detail)

judgments executed on the Egyptians. The blood of the sacrifice was the determining factor in the fate both of Israelites and Egyptians. Its absence on the doorposts of the Egyptians marked their firstborn for death, just as its presence on the Israelites' doorposts protected them. The sacrifice itself—the slaughter of the symbol of the chief god of Egypt—symbolized the “judgments” executed upon all of Egypt's divinities.²¹

Christians identified the Passover offering as the paradigmatic blood sacrifice under the abrogated Jewish covenant, before the advent of grace.²² The Passover offering was also understood as the typological antecedent par excellence for the sacrifice of Jesus.

Although Jesus, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,”²³ made salvation available to all, the means of that salvation—the eucharist—was available exclusively to Christians in a state of grace.²⁴ Only by abandoning the faith of their ancestors and becoming Christians might Jews achieve salvation.

The cluster of illuminations for the *piyyut Dayyenu* constitutes a sort of theological challenge to these ideas of the exclusivity and uniqueness of Christian salvation and the abrogation of the Jewish covenant with God. The illumination of *Pessaḥ Mizrayim*, juxtaposed with the *Dayyenu* text, presents the sacrifice not as a bloody relic of an abrogated covenant, nor as a type of salvation available solely to those who would accept Jesus as the messiah and son of God. Here, the Passover sacrifice is an eternally valid, divinely ordained rite with vast and actual salvific power. Moreover, it is exclusive to Jews, a symbolic evocation of their special relationship with God through the Abrahamic covenant. *Pessaḥ Mizrayim* is intrinsically linked to the covenant in that only Jews who were full members of the community could consume it, per Exodus 12:48. The illumination thus explicitly highlights the indispensability of the Passover sacrifice for the salvation of the Israelites, while implicitly asserting the necessity of being a covenanted member of the Jewish people in order to partake in the sacrifice, and, hence, in the salvation it afforded. A medieval Jew confronted with this image of the *Pessaḥ Mizrayim* in its textual context would understand it as an emblem of the exclusivity and uniqueness of the salvation available to Jews through their covenantal relationship with God, a sort of Jewish twist on John’s assertion that “salvation is of the Jews,” and a reversal of the Christian typology of the Passover sacrifice.²⁵

GRUMBLING DOES NOT ABROGATE THE COVENANT

Skipping folio 21v (plate 11) for the moment, I proceed to the central illumination of the cluster. On folio 22r, there is a spare and laconic illumination of four left-facing figures approaching a right-facing figure at the far left (see fig. 28; plate 12). At right, there are three male figures, one bearded, facing left, arms at chest level. The first figure on the right has one hand over his heart, the other extended, a medieval convention for spoken self-expression. The other two have both hands outstretched in gestures indicating pleading speech. At the left, separated from the three by the width of a single figure, a young male approaches an older, bearded male figure at the far left, whose head is turned to face right. The young figure nearly touches the bearded figure with his pleading gesture, and the bearded figure opens his mouth as if in reply.²⁶

Narkiss’s description of this scene as “the dance of the Israelites at the shores of the Red Sea” is problematic: there are no drowned Egyptians, nor any women with timbrels, and according to contemporary iconographic conventions of gesture, the movements and expressions of the individuals shown as they approach the bearded figure at the left

FIGURE 29

Left: “*Dass ist der Meier* [This is Meier].” Right (per Narkiss): “*Dass ist der Eisik* [This is Eisik]” (though it may simply repeat “*Dass ist der Meier*”). Birds’ Head Haggadah, fol. 22r (detail)



are not those of dancing and singing, but of discursive utterance. Given the fact that this illumination is preceded by the depiction of the splitting of the Sea and followed by that of the descent of the manna and quails, one may deduce that it in fact depicts the complaints of the Israelites to Moses in the desert (Numbers 11:16–17), the episode that precipitated the descent of the quails.²⁷

This identification is bolstered by the faint cursive inscriptions visible above the characters, at left: “*Dass ist der Meier* [This is Meier],” and at right (per Narkiss): “*Dass ist der Eisik* [This is Eisik]” (though it seems to me to repeat “*Dass ist der Meier*”)—glosses of a kind not found anywhere else in the manuscript (fig. 29). If the captioner intended to properly excoriate Meier and Eisik, their names might have appeared in connection with the figures of Datan and Aviram, or even that of Pharaoh. That Meier and Eisik are not associated with such truly dastardly characters makes the intention seem less to castigate than to gently mock them. But why do they appear here in particular, and what do they mock? If what was risible about Meier and Eisik was (for argument’s sake) their big-nosed resemblance to the bird-headed figures, the glosses might have appeared anywhere in the manuscript.²⁸

I believe that the placement of these inscriptions confirms that at least some of the manuscript’s audiences perceived this illumination to represent the complaints of the Israelites in the desert, to be answered on the next folio with the miraculous descent of the manna and the quails (see fig. 32; plate 13). If one interprets the tone of the inscriptions as one of gentle mockery, they yield a sort of playful equation between their subjects and the complaining Israelites. Put simply, Meier and Eisik are not being ridiculed because they were poor dancers or singers but rather, perhaps, because they, like the Israelites depicted here, had a tendency to grumble.

Humorous as this gloss may be, grumbling is a serious business with theological repercussions. Christian theology asserted that it was the grumbling of the Israelites prior to receiving the manna and quails in the wilderness that was the prototypical demonstration of their lack of faith. This lack proved the Jews unworthy of their status as the chosen people, and their infidelity in the desert foreshadowed their later faithlessness in

rejecting God's salvation in the form of his only begotten son (1 Corinthians 10:1–10). As a result of this Israelite perfidy, a fresh covenant had to be struck with a “New” Israel: the community of Christian believers. Interestingly, it is the representation of the complaints of the Israelites, so damning of the Jews in Christian eyes, that appears as the central illumination in this cluster. Though it is neither flattering to the Israelites nor explicitly mentioned in *Dayyenu*, the infamous murmuring is acknowledged by its representation in this illumination. But it is contextualized, literally “framed” in such a way that it stands as a rebuke to Christian assertions that the Israelites caused the revocation of the covenant when they “murmured” against Moses in the desert.²⁹

The illustration appears between the depiction of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds into paths before the Israelites on folio 21v and that of the descent of the manna and quails in the wilderness on folio 22v, two incidents of divine providence par excellence. Thus, in its context, the illumination of the murmuring Israelites is surrounded by evidence of God's continuing and miraculous providence in spite of Israelite misbehavior. God's providence is evident both before the complaints (at the splitting of the Sea of Reeds) and after them (when the manna and the quails descend even in the wake of the grumbling of the people). These two images both enfold and reinterpret the illumination of the complaints in the desert. That image is transformed from an isolated representation of unappreciativeness into one that, in context, bears witness to divine forbearance. Instead of being about the intransigence of the grumbling Israelites, the illumination is positioned in such a way as to cause it to refer to God's patience and his upholding of the covenant.

Christians read the episode of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds typologically, understanding it as a type of baptism. Rabbinic interpretation, however, possibly in response to this typological reading, asserts that the sea split only when it “beheld the sign of the Covenant (i.e. circumcision) on the bodies of the Israelites,” a confirmation of the covenant by the very forces of nature. Thus, the illumination that precedes the representation of the complaints explicitly reaffirms the salvific power of covenant/circumcision parallel to the implicit confirmation afforded by the illumination of *Pessah Mizrayim*. The descent of the manna and the quails parallels the splitting of the sea as an illustration of the continuing potency of the covenant and of divine providence.³⁰

There are many events described in the *piyyut Dayyenu*, and the authorship made a strategic choice to have the artists illuminate those incidents that were most essential to a shorthand summary of the Exodus narrative. At the same time, the choices it made and the manner in which it requested the arrangement of the illuminations has a polemic thrust as well: it emphasizes that in a Jewish context, the misjudgments and indiscretions of the Israelites do not render them or their descendants unworthy recipients of God's



FIGURE 30
Moses receiving the Torah as two tablets at Mount Sinai and transmitting it, in the form of five tablets, representing the five books of the Pentateuch, to Joshua. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 23r (detail)

grace. The framing illustrations make it clear that although the Israelites did complain against God and Moses, their chosen status—which allowed the forces of nature to be miraculously bent on their behalf at the sea—still availed them in the wilderness after they had complained. And although it is acknowledged that their relationship with God needs to be renewed, they are offered not a new covenant through Jesus but a reaffirmation of the covenant in the form of *Brit Ḥorev*: God's giving of the Torah to the Israelites on Mount Sinai, represented in the final illumination of the cluster (fig. 30; plate 14).

THE CONTINUING COVENANT AT SINAI

In this illumination, Moses receives the two tablets of the Law from the blessing hand of God that appears in a cloud at the far left. Below, the figure of Moses is repeated as he transmits the tablets (which now number five, corresponding to the Five Books of the Torah) to a receiving figure under him, who is accompanied by another waiting figure. At right, a hatless, beardless “servant” figure sits cross-legged, roasting a ram on a spit over a fire.

Narkiss noted the interesting transition from two tablets to five, but asserted that the figure roasting the ram is inexplicable unless it is a misreading of an image of the worship of the Golden Calf that had originally appeared in his projected lost model. Such a blatant misreading—involving, as it does, neither a calf nor worshipping Israelites—would necessitate fairly oblivious or uncomprehending artists. But the authorship of the Birds' Head Haggadah was first of all sufficiently clever to comment on the transformative power of transmission upon textuality by illustrating the transformation from the “two tablets of the Law” to the “Five Books of the Torah” during the process of their transmission; secondly, sufficiently sensitive to midrashic nuance and social reality as to portray Datan and Aviram among the Egyptian hosts, and lastly, sufficiently attuned to the essence of the narrative as to ingeniously telegraph the haste of the Passover sacrifice in Egypt by showing the flying cloak of the sacrificing figure. An authorship that paid such attention to subtle details would not have made such a gross error as to confuse the Golden Calf with a representation of the roasting of a sacrificial ram at the foot of Mount Sinai.³¹

If one reads this illustration in light of the foregoing illuminations in the cluster, it becomes clear that the scene of the roasting of the ram is neither inexplicable nor a misreading, but a depiction of the institution of *Pessah Dorot*: the continuing observance of the Passover sacrifice that transformed it from a one-time ritual to an eternal sacrament to be repeated year in, year out at the seder table in memory of the Exodus and the Giving of the Law at Sinai, just as the eucharist is celebrated regularly in memory

of Jesus' last supper and sacrifice. Of all the many commandments given at Sinai, the institution of Passover is the one most immediately relevant to the Passover haggadah and to *Dayyenu*, and it is no wonder that it should be depicted here. Iconographically, this final illumination forms a parallel with the depiction of *Pessah Mizrayim* on the first folio of the cluster (see fig. 27; plate 10) as a further assertion of the continuing power of the covenant.

The *Dayyenu* cluster, thus, evinces a tripartite structure. The outer layers consist of depictions of *Pessah Mizrayim* and *Pessah Dorot*. These are both evocations of the *brit*, the covenant. The central element, interestingly, is the representation of the complaints of the Israelites, which would have indicted them in a Christian context but here is transformed by its envelopment in images of salvation into a trope of the triumph of the covenant in spite of its abuse by the Israelites. True to their identification with Judah—*Yehudah*, “the one who confesses”—the medieval Jews who created this manuscript acknowledge the sins of their ancestors who complained in the desert. But by representing the miraculous manifestation of divine providence in the form of the salvation at the Sea of Reeds, the descent of the manna and quails in the desert, and the institution of *Pessah Dorot* at the foot of Mount Sinai, they also assert the continued chosenness of Israel in spite of her transgressions. The idea of continuing chosenness is a central theme in the manuscript. It develops into an explicit polemic in the *mazah* cycle, to which I now turn.



FIGURE 31
Pessah Dorot, the Passover Sacrifice
 instituted at Mount Sinai. Birds' Head
 Haggadah, fol. 23r (detail)

4

Eucharistic Polemics

IN THE CATALOGUES OF CALUMNY visited upon the Jews in the Middle Ages, three accusations are distinguished by their particular virulence. The first is the ritual murder accusation: the charge that Jews killed Christians in premeditated enactment of ritual magic or ritualized violence. The second is the blood libel: the allegation that Jews used human blood for religious, ceremonial, or ritual magic. And the third is the host desecration libel: the claim that Jews stole and abused the consecrated host with the intent of mutilating and harming the real presence of the body of Jesus contained therein. While aspects of each of these libels are ancient in origin, they are renewed in the thirteenth century not merely as popular canards but as implicitly and absolutely conjoined elements in a larger theological program, with real and often serious implications for the sociopolitical situation of the Jewish minority in Western Christendom. In concert with developments in theological and popular attitudes of Christians toward the place of the eucharist in the divine economy and the place of the Jews in that economy, this unholy trinity of libels plays an essential role in the Church's shift from the consideration of Jews as a specially protected category of *infideles* to a particularly maleficent brood of *heretici*.¹

I have questioned the degree to which the attitudes toward non-Jews expressed in the iconography of the Birds' Head Haggadah was indicative of the actual manner in which the Jews who produced this manuscript interacted with Christians in Mainz circa 1300—how much of it reflected reality and how much of it was a sort of Jewish “theological rhetoric.” Similarly, there is no concurrence among scholars regarding the impact of the consolidations of Christian theological rhetoric I am about to describe on Church policies concerning the Jews, or concerning the effects of such policies on the treatment of Jews. What has become clear from the discussions in the literature is that there were many factors at work and no absolute causal relationship between what flowed from the pens of theologians and the relations between Jews and Christians in particular localities. The influence of individual preachers, the economic situation of local lords, the history of Jewish-Christian relations in discrete regions, districts, neighborhoods, and even households all could influence the encounter between Jewish and Christian cultures and individuals. The trickling-down of theology was only one of many factors which could spark violence (or promote concord) at the local level.²

While the trickle-down effects of shifts in theology are, thus, difficult to gauge, all scholars agree, however, that the shifts themselves occurred, and that the thirteenth

century was a crucial one for the reimagination of the eucharist. “Transubstantiation” was a neologism that arose from the eleventh-century debate over eucharistic theology, developed in the twelfth century within a realist philosophy of the universe, and was codified and promulgated in the thirteenth century by the Fourth Lateran Council. Throughout the twelfth century the symbol of the eucharist was being scrutinized in terms of substance and accidents, discussed, rethought, and redesigned. By the time of the Fourth Lateran Council, the use (and potential for abuse) of the eucharist had been transformed. The consecrated wafer was now defined as the element in which Christ’s body was physically and sacramentally made present through the words of a priest. The host was now distinguished from relics in that it was no longer used for the consecration of altars, because it manifested what theologians came to call God’s “real presence” and was not merely a “sign” of holiness. The Church imposed strict conformity to the recipe of wheaten bread of regulated size and shape, incorrupt wine, pure water, well-pronounced words of consecration, a male priest in a state of grace, and good intention in celebration.

In order to convey the new ideas of transubstantiation and ritual conformity, a new literary genre of commentaries on the mass appeared throughout the thirteenth century. Books with titles like *De Eucharistia* and *De Sacramento Altaris*, and various summae of the sacraments, were produced at Paris, Bologna, and Rome. Like the new penitential literature from the twelfth century, these works were part of an effort to educate the clergy, and to assure priests and their flocks an unerring grasp of and easy access to the new doctrines via vernacular sermons. At the same time, a distinct genre of tracts for the laity developed early in France, then spread to other areas.

The late thirteenth century seems to be the *terminus ad quem* for a firm construction of the basis of eucharistic theology, conveyed through these guidebooks, along with sermons and exempla, and through synodal legislation. Theologians continued to intellectually explore and disagree about the eucharist in the late Middle Ages, but they were suspicious of any change in its pastoral use. It was not until the Reformation that real change was again effected—this time, of course, a move away from the doctrines of transubstantiation and real presence.

FROM INFIDELES TO HERETICI

As these developments in sacramental theology and popular perception were redefining the nature of the eucharist as the real presence of the body of Christ, parallel developments were occurring with regard to ecclesiastic and lay perceptions of the nature of the Jews, as theological interpretation of their culpability in the Crucifixion was rethought by mendicant theologians. A fundamental question in the late twelfth century had been how and when one moved from being an infidel (one who does not know or acknowledge the

Gospel, whether through stubbornness or ignorance) to being a heretic (one who knows, but rejects the Gospel). Aquinas and others eventually propounded the thesis that only those to whom the Gospel had been preached and who had rejected the Gospel would be damned. The Jews, however, formed a special category: it is true that the Jews sinned grievously by rejecting Jesus when he was literally among them, but their rejection was intended by God as part of God's Great Plan for human salvation. God pulled a veil of blindness over the eyes of the Jews. They were a people whose destiny was to live—to be preserved—in this blindness, as a witness to the truth of Christianity, and to the fate of those who refuse the message of the Gospel. So long as it was acknowledged that this blindness was divinely ordained and inescapable, Jews, though damned, were to live under the protection of the Church. The Church, for its part, experienced a good deal of ambivalence and discomfort concerning its paradoxical role as *infidelium defensor*.

In the thirteenth century, however, with the increasing critique of the Talmud as a document deemed to be heretical vis-à-vis the Bible, there was a dramatic move toward a definition of Jews as heretics rather than infidels. As a result of that shift, the ever-ambivalent sense of responsibility the Church felt for the protection of the Jews began to erode in practice. I propose that the Church's justification for the shift emerged out of its rethinking of eucharistic theology and its ability to capitalize upon the harnessing of the ritual murder accusation to the blood libel against the backdrop of host desecration accusations.

Although Jews had been accused of murdering Christians since antiquity, and the charge that they used human blood in their rituals appeared from time to time as well, the thirteenth century saw a new hybrid of the ritual murder accusation with the blood libel. Jews were accused of the ritual murder and mutilation of the bodies of Christian children with a specific aim: the use of their blood in a mockery of the mass, or in the preparation of Passover *mazot*. The same period witnessed the birth of the host desecration libel. Again, tales of blind doubt and ridicule of the host by the Jews are of ancient origin, but they gave way in this century to a new genre describing vicious and intended abuse. In these tales a Jew or group of Jews procured a host, often through a Christian maid or someone in debt to them, and attacked it with axes and fire and knives in exact parallel to alleged acts of ritual murder. The host bled, surviving all manner of attack, and finally the Jews were led to execution; the miraculous host was revered, a chapel built in its honor, and processions, hymns, and memorials were created for it.³

A HYBRID ACCUSATION

The “trickling-down” of thirteenth-century conciliar decisions and scholastic ruminations concerning the real presence of Jesus in the consecrated host seems to have influenced the construction of both the host desecration libels and the hybrid accusation

of ritual murder with ritual blood use. These developments can be correlated with the increasingly prevalent manifestation of the image of the Infant Jesus appearing in the host, as depicted in popular exempla, miracle tales, and iconography. In their thirteenth-century recensions, both libels point to Jewish violence against the “body of God” and, by extension, against the innocent and unblemished Christian body. The “trickle-up” effect of these accusations, in combination with new definitions of Jews as heretics rather than infidels, served to justify concrete changes in the Church’s policy toward the Jews.

What is common among these libels is that each centered upon actions allegedly committed by Jews that recapitulate the violence of the Crucifixion. Each also revolved around the reenactment of the Passover, and each merged those ideas of reenactment with the concept of theurgical invocation of the real presence of God. In a post–Fourth Lateran Council context, where the doctrines of real presence and transubstantiation were promulgated, the alleged desecration of the host by the Jews was tantamount to an accusation of their continuing willful violence against the actual body of God. The promulgation of these doctrines ensures that the Last Supper was no longer a one-time event but would be perpetually renewed (in terms as real as the original moment) by the reincarnation of Jesus in the miracle of transubstantiation during the sacrament of the mass. At the same time, the horrific moment of the Crucifixion was eternally reenacted in the host desecration as a result of that same miracle of transubstantiation. The grace that suffused the world as a result of the eucharist was paralleled by the darkness permeating the world by the re-crucifixion of Jesus in the desecration, by the Jews, of his body in the form of the host. Thus, the more explicit connections between the host desecration libel and the ritual murder accusation are fairly obvious. The desecration of the host was deemed to be a desecration of the very body of God.⁴

If Jesus’ Last Supper was a Passover meal (a point hotly debated by scholars, but firmly ensconced in popular imagination from the Middle Ages to the present), then he, as a celebrant, likely uttered the words “This is the bread of affliction” (per the haggadah) as well as the words “This is my body” (Mark 14:22, Matthew 26:26), establishing a clear correlation between his suffering Jewish body and the cracked, burnt, unleavened bread before him. But theologians, after the Fourth Lateran Council, wished insofar as was possible to obviate this correlation. In the wake (and in the spirit) of the legislation of the council, these theologians, by deliberating on which body of Christ is physically present in the sacrament, were actually debating how to create the widest possible distance and the deepest conceivable sense of alterity between the body of Christ and the Jewish body, between “This is the bread of affliction” and “This is my body.”⁵

And so in the thirteenth century there was a definite inclination toward the privileging of that body of Christ that was most at odds with Christ’s historical adult suffering Jewish body. This is the period of the emergence of the image of the Christ child as the

body that was “present” in the host. Accordingly, theologians and canon lawyers concertededly constructed the pristine wafer as an object explicitly analogous to a child: it was small and fragile and required protection from abuse and ridicule, from loss, breakage, and decay. This image, which was designed to evoke compassion, came to inhabit a central place in eucharistic symbolism: the eucharist as child, as Miri Rubin puts it, “to be viewed, chewed, adored, sacrificed,” appeared again and again in various contexts, both textual and iconographic.⁶ Depictions could get quite gory, as in the case of the boy who had a vision during mass in which he saw the priest devour a child at the altar and afterwards recoiled from the priest in horror out of fear that a similar fate would befall him.⁷

BREAD OF AFFLICTION VERSUS BREAD OF SALVATION

The host desecration libel contrasted the classical Jewish concept of the “bread of affliction” with the “bread of salvation” under the New Dispensation: for the Church, the host remained the “bread of affliction” only insofar as it was bread that was afflicted by the Jews.⁸ In all its other particulars it was regularized, sanitized, and even miniaturized. One sees in the legislation about the size and shape of the wafer introduced in this period the concrete manifestations of theological speculation that reacted against the cracked, burnt, and generally untidy *mazah* and in favor of a pristine wafer—an entire set of regulations developed to control its making, keeping, disposal, and reservation. What is known of the directives concerning the process of the manufacture of the host from Lanfranc’s *Constitutions*, which mandate the daily rituals of Anglo-Norman monastic life, was remarkably similar to what one might see in contemporary *ḥaredi* (ultra-Orthodox) *mazah* bakeries: like *mazah*, it was incised (though not with lines, but with the monogram of Jesus’ name in Greek). It was prepared in a careful procedure that involved special tables and ovens, reliable and properly vested bakers, and silence except for the singing of psalms, and baked in a wood-fed oven.⁹ The Fourth Lateran Council mandated that “in all churches, chrism and the eucharist should be reserved under the reliable protection of lock and key.”¹⁰ From the late thirteenth and by the fourteenth century, it was clear that the appropriate mode of keeping the host was in a lockable vessel, both before and after its consecration. In Italy tabernacles were built into the walls of churches during the thirteenth century, while in northern Europe the eucharist was reserved in “sacrament houses”—towering structures, sometimes in the shape of cathedral spires, placed in the sanctuary.¹¹

As the host was increasingly regulated, defined, and, most important, refined, the continued existence of *mazah* qua *mazah* among the Jews appeared more and more like a mockery of the eucharist. For the Church, the continued Jewish use of *mazah*, like the continued existence of the Jews themselves, who persisted in their damnable errors, was a reminder of the benighted literal nature of Jewish observance. As the continued existence

of Jews came to be viewed more than ever before as a slap in the face of Christianity, the Jews were perceived as doing violence to the idea of the eucharist by continuing in the error of maintaining the Paschal bread in its abrogated state—ignoring the fact that the New Dispensation had spiritualized it and the Church had regulated and refined it.

With the appearance of the Christ child in the increasingly pristine and refined host, the host desecration libel and the ritual murder accusation were reduced to the same terms; they became, in essence, the same libel transposed in different keys. One can read such diverse phenomena as legislation regarding the size and appearance of the host, the accounts of the miraculous appearance of the Christ child in the eucharist, and the preponderance of children among the alleged victims of ritual murder as answers to Jewish stubbornness in continuing to conceptualize *maḥaz* as “bread of affliction.”

THE LETTER KILLS: LITERALISM AND MAḤAZ

The issue of Jewish literalness and stubbornness also pervaded the blood libel as it became linked with the ritual murder accusation. Just as the ritual murder accusation in this period was a broadening and popularization of the rarefied and theologically subtle host desecration libel, so was the accusation that Jews use the blood of murdered Christian children in their Passover rituals a broadening and popularization of the subtle (and, apparently, not sufficiently bloody and graphic) idea that the persistence of *maḥaz qua maḥaz* was itself an affront to Christianity. One can imagine the reasoning: If the Jews as a people were fully aware of the miracle of the incarnation and the power of its reenactment on every altar in Christendom (as the clergy maintained in using tales of host desecration as exempla), then they must have been dissatisfied with the “inefficacy” of their own rituals. The desecration of the host thus became “evidence” of the secret Jewish belief in the efficacy of Christian rituals. Jews were represented by this libel as being jealous of the Christian version of the Passover, which after the Fourth Lateran Council became, beyond a mere reenactment, a successful act of theurgy, of the draining down of God’s real presence into the consecrated wafer. Because the Jews, as people of the letter rather than of the spirit, could not effect this theurgical reenactment without an actual, literal crucified victim, they had to kill a Christian child, in a reenactment of the Crucifixion, and use his blood to replicate, by their black arts, an *ad litteram*, demonic simulacrum of the host.¹²

This idea has its roots in accusations of Jewish “hypocrisy” in the Gospels, where “hypocrite” is often synonymous with “scribe, Pharisee, or Jew.” It surfaces frequently and with much viciousness throughout the history of anti-Judaism; the anti-Jewish fantasy that Jews secretly enjoy pork, for instance, provided occasion for much gleeful material in English caricature from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries.

Clerical abuse and hypocrisy among Christians in thirteenth-century Europe did not go unnoted either Jews or Christians themselves. Living in such a climate, Christians naturally would have suspected similar secret abuse and hypocrisy among Jews.¹³

As the eucharist was definitively identified not as a memorial but as the real and continuing presence of God, so too through the transubstantial effects of these libels did the Jews gain real presence as the confirmed and verifiable perpetual enemies of God and of Christendom. Thus, eucharistic theology and popular eucharistic piety colluded in the thirteenth century to allow local church authorities greater license in becoming more active partners with the mob in the persecution of Jews. The often-invoked denials of the veracity of these libels and the condemnations of the local Church's participation in punishing the Jews for such alleged misdeeds by various thirteenth- and fourteenth-century popes only confirms that more of these persecutions were occurring. Popes condemned these libels and the mob violence precipitated by them, while at the same time continuing to promulgate theology that could feed such libels and violence as they trickled down to the provincial, diocesan, and parochial levels.¹⁴

JEWISH RESPONSE

In such a climate, any sort of Jewish commentary on eucharistic piety would be risky, hence rare, and a critique of theology or its ramifications would necessarily have to be heavily veiled. The Birds' Head Haggadah affords an extraordinary glimpse of what can be interpreted as an iconographic response. This response is threefold: a theological argument against the singularity, superiority, and salvific efficacy of the eucharist; exposure of the details of the *mazah*-making process that explicitly defends its innocence; and a polemic against the violence of the Christian response to continued Jewish ritual observance emerging from eucharistic theology.

In the illumination of the descent of the manna and quails on folio 22v, the small, round, flat manna bears an unmistakable resemblance to eucharistic wafers, and the (single) quail is shown in bird's-eye view as it appears from above, in a manner analogous to Christian treatments of the descent of the dove of the Holy Spirit on such occasions as the baptism of Jesus or the moment of eucharistic transubstantiation (figs. 32, 33).¹⁵ Why were these eucharistic motifs adapted for this particular illumination? How were they used in a Jewish context, as opposed to a Christian one, and what would they have meant to a Jewish audience? While this illustration is part of the *Dayyenu* cycle, where it represents the continuity of divine providence in spite of the complaints of the Israelites, it also fits into another sequence, the *mazah* cycle. The illustration of the manna serves as a sort of preface to that cycle, which is found on folios 24v–26r (plates 15–18), literally at the center—the “backbone”—of the manuscript.



FIGURE 32
Descent of the (eucharistic) manna and quail (in the form of the dove of the Holy Spirit). Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 22v (detail)

FIGURE 33 BELOW
Descent of the dove of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism. *Psalter*, Oxford, London, BL, MS Arundel 157, fol. 5v (detail)



FIGURE 34 LEFT
Pricking the mazah. Birds' Head
Haggadah, fol. 25v (detail)



FIGURE 35 RIGHT
Baking the mazah. Birds' Head
Haggadah, fol. 26r (detail)



The cycle proper begins on folios 24v–25r (see fig. 5; plates 15–16), where Pharaoh and his soldiers (depicted as the Holy Roman Emperor and his knights) appear hard on the heels of the Israelites as they ready themselves to leave Egypt. This illumination is counterscriptural: the biblical text clearly states that the Egyptians did not chase down the Israelites until they were well into the desert, overtaking them only on the shores of the Sea of Reeds (Exodus 14:6–9). This illustration, which shows them pursuing the Children of Israel at the moment that they are preparing their dough for the journey (Exodus 12:34), cannot in any way be mistaken for a literal representation of the biblical text. But, as I will demonstrate, neither ought it to be regarded as an error in placement or a misunderstanding. The central figure on folio 25v (plate 17), which depicts a medieval mazah-baking scene, is a man instructing a woman and child in the pricking of the dough (fig. 34). On folio 26r (plate 18) there are two men actually baking the mazah in a large domed oven at the far left (fig. 35).

Just as the scenes of the Israelites bearing their dough and of the baking of mazot are physically central to the manuscript, they are also paramount to the religiohistorical and socioreligious context of the Birds' Head Haggadah. In light of the belief that mazah was a sort of demonic simulacrum of the host, pre-Passover mazah baking could be viewed with much suspicion by Christians; the seder could become in their imagination a species of Demonic mass. Accordingly, particularly if fueled by a host desecration or ritual murder libel, mob response to Jewish preparations during the Easter/Passover season could be particularly angry and dangerously violent.¹⁶

EUCCHARISTIC MANNA AND THE QUAIL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The illumination on folio 22v (see fig. 32; plate 13) of the descent of the manna in the wilderness may be read as constituting a Jewish response in the larger context of a working-through of the conflict of mazah versus *hostia*—what I have described as the battle between the “bread of affliction” and the “bread of salvation.” Jews moved to reappropriate the ideas of heavenly bread and bread of salvation, often reversing

traditional Christian typologies to do so. Thus, when the manna is represented in the shape of eucharistic hosts, and the quail in the form of the dove of the Holy Spirit, it is neither a simple nor an unconsidered appropriation of Christian imagery. It is, rather, a sophisticated and culturally literate rejoinder to Christianity on the theological level, accentuating the idea of manna as an indigenously Jewish heavenly bread and bread of salvation by conscious appropriation of Christian iconographic conventions. The Jews here answer the charge that they harbor jealousy over Christian access to “heavenly bread.” The central accusation of host desecration libels. They assert that they have their own heavenly bread, and that they do not need to replicate the eucharist in their mazot by nefarious means.

The illumination parries the assertions behind eucharistic theology of the uniqueness of the eucharist as “heavenly bread” by reversing an old standard of Christian typology: the manna in the wilderness as a foreshadowing of the eucharist. In Christian theology, the eucharist, with its actual power to redeem the soul of the Christian who consumed it in a state of grace, was far superior to manna, its “type.” The eucharist was a manifestation of the dispensation of grace with salvific might, whereas manna was a mere foreshadowing under the dispensation of Law, with no power to save. Manna represented divine providence in an antique and since-superseded period of history that had existed only to hint at the Christian redemption to come.

For the Jews, by contrast, the eucharistic host was nothing more than “abominable bread,” whereas the manna was heavenly bread from the highest sphere. The eucharist was an imitation of manna, a human institution that could never hope to rival the bread that God himself had rained down on the Israelites—hence, the highly literate cleverness of the Jewish appropriation, and the reversal of the imagery of the eucharist to represent manna in the Birds’ Head Haggadah.¹⁷

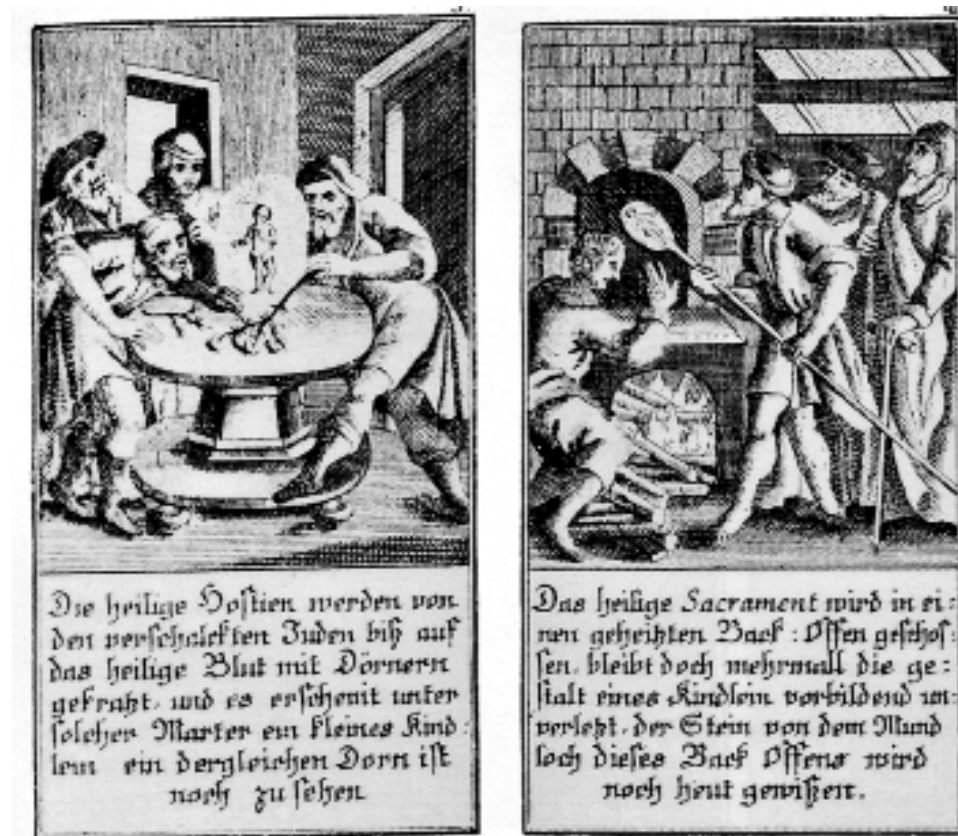
MAZAH-MAKING EXPOSED

The two illuminations at the heart of the Birds’ Head Haggadah can be read against this backdrop of theology, popular accusation, and the threat of mob violence, specifically over the issue of mazah. It goes without saying that the baking of mazah is central to the metanarrative of the haggadah, but the emphases here—not on the rolling of the dough or the mixing of the flour, but specifically on the pricking and baking of the mazah—correspond exactly to the accusations in the host desecration libel: that Jews first pricked and then burned the consecrated host (fig. 36).

Furthermore, the illustration of the Egyptian pursuers on the previous folio, where they appear to pursue the Israelites not as they cross the Sea of Reeds, as per the biblical text (Exodus 14:9), but rather as they prepare their dough, is neither an error nor a misplacement. It is a conscious displacement, the intent and priority of which is to reflect

FIGURE 36

“Profanation of the host” at Deggen-
dorf 1337. An imaginary depiction of
Jews desecrating the host by prick-
ing and burning it. Engraving from
*Das obsiegende Glaubens-Wunder
des ganz christlichen Chur-Landes
Bayren*, ed. J. G. S. Driendorfer, 1776



medieval experience, rather than to literally illustrate the biblical text. In the Bible, the Egyptians pursue the Israelites who fled their country in order to reindenture them, but such was not the reality of medieval Jewish life in Ashkenaz. When Jews were expelled, no one pursued them to bring them back. Accordingly, the Birds’ Head Haggadah consciously deviates from the biblical narrative, and folio 21v shows the Israelites crossing the Sea of Reeds unhindered by pursuers.

The iconography is reconfigured to represent a regularly recurring occasion in medieval Jewish life when Jews felt particularly pursued and hounded, and during which they *could* be rounded up and taken into custody by armed authorities. The illustration displaces the image of the pursuing Egyptians to this juncture, where the Jews are preparing their dough, palpably representing the anxiety that Jews in medieval Mainz may have felt at this time of the year in light of host desecration accusations and riots, and the extreme pressure they might have experienced with regard to the risky process of the preparation of their own mazah dough.

As the idea of chamber serfdom was consolidated under Rudolf of Habsburg (1273–1291) Jews in Mainz experienced a number of violent incidents, including the plundering of the synagogue and murder of the rabbi in 1281, and an Easter attack and riot following a ritual murder accusation in 1283 that resulted in the murder of ten Jews, though the aldermen managed to save most of the others and the archbishop punished the perpetrators. In the late thirteenth century as well, towns in proximity to Mainz also experienced

attacks against Jews, in which some were killed and some forcibly baptized. Another ritual murder libel occurred in Munich in 1285, and when the Jews there refused to allow themselves to be baptized, the mob burned between one hundred and thirty two and one hundred and eighty in the synagogue. In 1286, the Jews of Mainz were again accused of child murder, and the king intervened unsuccessfully. A literal exodus followed these events, with R. Meir of Rothenberg leading many Jewish families out of Mainz and the surrounding towns, with the aim of traveling to the Land of Israel. R. Meir was captured in June 1286, and the emperor enacted a law forbidding Jews to leave their homes without permission of their local lords, because they were his property as *servi camerae Regis*. A blood libel charge with an accusation of a reenactment of the Crucifixion occurred in 1287 and resulted in further mob violence against the Jews of Mainz. And the year 1298 and the early years of the fourteenth century—the very years in which the Birds’ Head Haggadah was being illuminated—saw the so-called Rindfleisch massacres, stirred up by accusations of host desecration.¹⁸

Taken together, and placed against the backdrop of these experiences, the two illuminations—that of the pursuing Egyptians and the Israelites preparing their dough—represent a “strong reading” of the verse connected with the dough. “And the Egyptians put pressure upon the people to leave the land, for they said, ‘We are all dying,’ And the people took their dough,” and so forth (Exodus 12:33–34). The illumination is not a literal one as it gives no indication of dying Egyptians; they appear with fully armed chariots and horses more appropriate, as noted, to the later description of the Egyptian pursuit with chariots and horses at the Sea of Reeds (Exodus 14:6–9). Rather, it may be representative of the psychological climate into which it was born. Faceless Egyptians with horses and chariots, pursuing the Israelites full force, urged on by Datan and Aviram under the standard of the black eagle, are a thinly veiled reference to imperial forces abetted by the informers and inciters among the Jewish converts to Christianity, descending upon Jews at the Passover season to accuse them of ritual abuse of the consecrated eucharist. It is fascinating that in spite of numerous other possible points in the iconographic interpretation of the narrative, the only place where non-Jews make their appearance in this manuscript is in connection with *mazah* baking, which I have explained as a very thinly veiled reference to anxiety over accusations of host desecration and the repercussions of such accusations.

The *mazah* cluster is set aside from the rest of the Exodus cluster and is the most central of all the scenes. The pursuit scene directly proceeds from the scene of contemporary *mazah* baking. These details in particular form an important part of the meta-narrative, answering directly the Christian accusations of abuse of the host by pricking and burning. In a climate of host desecration accusation, the very act of *mazah* baking was both risky and demonstrative. Its representation in these illuminations is perhaps

intended as an answer to descriptions and depictions of Jewish desecration of the host, with their emphasis on the pricking and the burning of the consecrated wafer (see fig. 36). The illuminations explicate what goes on behind closed Jewish doors: rather than some nefarious occult ritual, there is simply the baking of unleavened bread—neither injury to nor replication of the host—with the pricker and the oven used for completely innocent purposes.

The Birds' Head Haggadah engages in serious polemic with the contemporary Christian majority doctrine in response to very real threats. Its illuminations respond on the sociological level, providing access to Jewish kitchens, publicly declaring and displaying the fact that Jewish *mazot* are simply *mazot* rather than attempts to magically replicate the eucharist. They stress that the use of *mazah* emerges from a specific historical context in the Jewish experience. They defend the process of *mazah* preparation, asserting that the pricking and the baking involved in their contemporary fabrication are not to be mistaken for a rite of the degradation of the eucharist or as an occasion for ritual murder. Finally, they rearrange the scriptural sequence somewhat and link it with the scenes of Pharaoh's pursuit of the Israelites, going so far as to depict Pharaoh as the Holy Roman emperor—all in response to the pressure exerted and the violence wreaked upon Jews over the issue of *mazah* preparation. The meaning of *mazah* is thus claimed for the Jewish viewer by the illuminations: its preparation is justified, its use is defended, and those who would persecute Jews simply for preparing it are condemned.

THE ILLUMINATIONS OF THE *mazah* cycle of the Birds' Head Haggadah serve as an indigenously Jewish response—with deep roots in the rabbinic tradition—to Christian valorization of the unique, salvific valence of the eucharist. But the iconography also answers another assertion of eucharistic theology: the doctrine of the interpenetrability of time during the mass. Christians saw the eucharistic celebration as metahistorical and infinitely replicable. Not only was the celebration of the mass deemed by Christians to be a recapitulation of the Last Supper, with Christ present at the moment of the elevation and consecration of the host. The *verum corpus*—the actual body of Christ—was, in fact, present on every altar in Christendom every time a priest consecrated wine and wafer.¹

In the Birds' Head Haggadah, the Passover seder is presented as a metahistorical topos that predates, parallels, and indeed rivals the metahistoricity of the mass. Certain scenes in the narrative sequence seem to be deliberately designed to be read asynchronously in order to create an indigenously Jewish species of temporal interpenetrability. There is an avulsion of the scenes of *mazah* preparation from their expected order: Pharaoh pursues the Israelites not at the Sea of Reeds per the biblical text but at the moment they leave Egypt with their dough. And there is an elision of scenes from the biblical Exodus with contemporary details such as imperial symbols and medieval *mazah* baking practices. If one assumes that the illuminations are meant to be “literal,” then their arrangement here shows, as Narkiss argued, that the artists were confused regarding the representation of the biblical narrative. But if one understands them not as a mistaken arrangement of illustrations of the literal text of Exodus or the Passover Haggadah but as a deliberate *rearrangement* intended to emphasize particular junctures in a comprehensive virtual metanarrative of Jewish collective memory, the manuscript no longer appears as a confused sequence of illuminations. Instead, it presents itself as a sophisticated iconographic evocation of the rabbinic and medieval construction of the interpenetrability of mythic and historical time.

The metahistoricity of Passover is made explicit in what I call the *Qorban Pessaḥ* strand, a thread running through and relating to the other narrative-iconographic clusters and, ultimately, binding all the illuminations together thematically.²

FIVE PASSOVERS

This strand encompasses the depictions of the five different strata of Passover observances discussed in the Jewish tradition, both rabbinic and medieval. First is a typological, or foreshadowing, stratum that antedates the actual historical Exodus. Next are two historical strata: the initiatory, or Egyptian, Passover, called by the rabbis *Pessah Mizrayim*; and the Passover instituted at Mount Sinai, lasting through Temple times, named *Pessah Dorot*. Then comes the Passover of post-Temple times: the period encompassing the Christian Middle Ages through the present day (*Pessah Ba-Zman Ha-Zeh*). Finally, the rabbis envisioned, and the *payytanim*—the syagogue poets—poetically described an eschatological stratum, the Passover of Redemption. This is the Passover yet to come, when the Temple is rebuilt and the sacrifice can once again be offered. It is not given a specific name by the rabbis, but, for the sake of symmetry, I will call it *Pessah Ge'ulah*. Each of these five Passovers was understood to have its own particular ethos, and each is represented among the illuminations of this manuscript.³

FORESHADOWING PASSOVER

Midrashic literature and medieval *piyyutim* project distinct typological foreshadowings of Passover upon various biblical events. The annunciation of Isaac's birth, for instance, was traditionally held to have occurred on Passover, because Abraham and Sarah are described in the biblical text as preparing three unleavened cakes (proto-mazot) for the divine messengers. Likewise, the *'Akedah*, the binding of Isaac, was associated with Passover in some rabbinic sources, and explicitly with the Paschal sacrifice in very early works like the Book of Jubilees (though rabbinic tradition later connected it with Rosh HaShanah). Although *Exodus Rabbah* depicts the *'Akedah* as taking place in the month of Nissan, during which Passover falls, a more direct and explicit connection of the *'Akedah* with the Paschal sacrifice seems to have fallen somewhat out of exegetical favor among Jews because of the Christian appropriation of the *'Akedah*, along with *Pessah Mizrayim*, as typological antecedents of the sacrifice of Jesus.⁴

Interestingly, whenever the Passover sacrifice is depicted in the Birds' Head Haggadah, the sacrificial animal is a horned ram rather than the expected lamb. This ram first appears in the illumination of the *'Akedah* (fig. 37; plate 7) and, subsequently, it is represented as being slaughtered in connection with *Pessah Mizrayim* (see fig. 27; plate 10), roasted in association with *Pessah Dorot* (see fig. 31; plate 14), and brought to table as the culmination of the seder of *Pessah Ge'ulah* (plate 19). It is doubtful that the authorship of the Birds' Head Haggadah was familiar with the very ancient Jewish typological tradition reflected in Jubilees wherein the ram of the *'Akedah* was equated with the Paschal sacrifice. However, the authorship certainly knew of Jewish typologies linking the birth of Isaac

with Passover via references to the event that were incorporated into the contemporary Ashkenazic seder liturgy and included in the text of the Birds' Head Haggadah itself. It could easily have made the connection on its own via the tradition of the Passover date of the *'Akedah* in the widely known text of *Exodus Rabbah*. And it is certainly possible that it was aware of the Christian typology that linked the *'Akedah* with the crucifixion.⁵

While it might be argued that the image of the ram (rather than a lamb or a kid) was employed because it was the only one available to the artists in a conjectured model book, I believe that the use of the image of a ram for the Passover sacrifice throughout the manuscript may represent a deliberate attempt to reappropriate Christian typology in order to formulate a Jewish response to it. The inclusion of the *'Akedah*, and the equation between the victim of the *'Akedah* and the later Passover sacrifices, can be viewed as an attempt on the part of the manuscript's authorship to respond to Christian claims of the primacy and exclusive salvific power of the sacrifice of Jesus. The authorship accomplishes this by emphasizing the *'Akedah* as the true typological antecedent of the Passover sacrifice, rather than the Crucifixion as its antitype. The "invention" of a Jewish typology that so precisely and effectively counters Christian typology could certainly have occurred without conscious awareness of the presence of such a topos in ancient Jewish tradition. By the inclusion of the *'Akedah* and the consistent representation of the Passover sacrifice in the form of a ram, the Birds' Head Haggadah attempts to reclaim the *'Akedah* in the same manner that it recovers or transforms other typologies used by Christians for Christological and eucharistic purposes, such as *Pessah Mizrayim* and the descent of the manna.

HISTORICAL PASSOVERS

After the typological or foreshadowing stratum, one encounters the more obvious "historical" strata. *Pessah Mizrayim*, the initial or Egyptian Passover sacrifice, is first: the unique event that saved the Israelites from the last of the Ten Plagues, the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn, and that set the Exodus in motion. The essence of *Pessah Mizrayim* is illustrated here by the sacrificial act: the officiant slits the throat of the ram and catches its blood in a bowl for use as a marker on the doorposts of the Israelite houses (fig. 38; plate 10).⁶

Next comes *Pessah Dorot*, the Passover sacrifice as it was carried out subsequent to the first Passover—upon the entry of the Israelites into the Land of Promise, and throughout the period of the first and second Temples. The spreading of the blood on the doorposts was not replicated in the institution of *Pessah Dorot*, the central focus of which was, instead, the consumption of the sacrifice and the retelling of the narrative of the Exodus. Accordingly, in the illumination of the Sinaitic institution of *Pessah Dorot*, it is not the slaughter but the roasting of the ram that is depicted (fig. 39; plate 14).

FIGURE 37 LEFT
Ram of the *'Akedah*. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 15v (detail)



FIGURE 38 RIGHT
Ram of *Pessah Mizrayim*. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 21r (detail)



The Passover of post-Temple times (*Pessah Ba-Zeman Ha-Zeh*) is truly the Passover of the “Middle Ages.” Just as Christian tradition considered the Middle Ages to be the period between the First and Second Coming of Jesus, for Jews, the *zeman ha-zeh* (the present age) was the era between the destruction of the first two Temples and the anticipated construction of a third. *Pessah Ba-Zeman Ha-Zeh*, notable for the absence of the sacrifice and its attendant rituals, is the Passover for which the text of the haggadah was composed. It is contrasted with *Pessah Dorot* in various statements within the haggadah text, such as “The Passover sacrifice that our ancestors ate when the Temple was in existence,” or “In memory of the Temple, according to the custom of Hillel.”⁷⁷ This Passover is represented in the illustrations of the haggadah by the various ritual and liturgical illuminations of the contemporary seder. Appropriately, no illumination of the slaughtering, roasting, or consumption of the Passover sacrifice appears among the illustrations of the contemporary seder in the Birds' Head Haggadah, which represents medieval Passover sans sacrifice. Finally, Jews awaited the eschatological *Pessah*, *Pessah Ge'ulah*, the Passover of the Redemption, with a restored Passover sacrifice in a rebuilt Temple. This is the *Pessah* evoked in the haggadah's dramatic statement of culmination: “*Le-shanah ha-ba'ah b'Irushalayim* [Within the coming year, in Jerusalem!].”⁷⁸

ESCHATOLOGICAL PASSOVER

Narkiss maintained that all the illustrations of the Passover sacrifice were “part of a [single] historical cycle depicting the First Passover in Egypt and the preparations for it, or as part of the ritual cycle of preparations for any Passover eve.”⁷⁹ According to this latter interpretation, the illumination that accompanies the text of *Lefkikhakh* (plate 19) would be an illustration of *Pessah Ba-Zeman Ha-Zeh*. But that illumination depicts a roasted ram being served at the seder table (fig. 40). This scenario is unlikely, as there was a strict halakhic prohibition of roasted lamb or any other roasted food on the seder night, particularly in Ashkenaz, in order not to seem as if one was attempting to reinstate the Paschal sacrifice before its time. An Ashkenazic authorship would have been loath to include the image of a sacrificed, roasted ram—horns and all—being brought to table



FIGURE 39 LEFT
Ram of *Pessah Dorot*. Birds' Head
Haggadah fol. 23r (detail)

FIGURE 40 RIGHT
Ram of *Pessah Ge'ulah*. Birds' Head
Haggadah fol. 26v (detail)

in a scene of a Passover seder *Ba-Zeman Ha-Zeh*, knowing very well that there was no roast lamb served at the seder. Thus it would seem that this illumination depicts not a contemporary scene but a scene—*le-'atid lav'oh*—in the (redeemed) future age.¹⁰

The accompanying text corroborates this possibility. *Lefikhakh* is the text in the haggadah that most directly emphasizes the interpenetrability of mythic and historical time at the seder. It explicitly designates the moment of its recitation as the moment of elision of *Pessah Mizrayim* and *Pessah Dorot* with *Pessah Ba-Zeman Ha-Zeh*: “Therefore it is our duty to thank, to laud, to praise, to glorify, to exalt, to adore, to bless, to elevate and to honor the One who performed all these miracles for our ancestors [*Pessah Mizrayim*, *Pessah Dorot*] and for us [*Pessah Ba-Zeman Ha-Zeh*].”¹¹

The illumination goes further: it emphasizes that what is taking place on the page (and, by extrapolation, that what, it is hoped, “speedily and in our day” will be taking place outside the page, in the viewer’s space and time) is not only an elision of *Pessah Mizrayim* and *Pessah Dorot* with *Pessah Ba-Zeman Ha-Zeh*, but also a seder of redemption. Certain elements in its iconography distinguish it as a depiction of *Pessah Ge'ulah*. While all the other ritual illuminations—illustrating Passover in the present age—show only one or two people sitting at the table, a large group of celebrants appears here, emphasizing the communal aspect: a time when all will celebrate joyously together instead of atomized, and possibly fearful, in their individual homes. The figures are not depicted at opposite ends of the table, as in other instances of ritual illustration in the manuscript, but sit posed frontally at a celebratory banquet table.¹²

Most significantly, it is only in the context of this portrayal of the eschatological feast of the Passover of Redemption (plate 19) that the Paschal sacrifice, hitherto depicted as being slaughtered (in the illumination of *Pessah Mizrayim*) or roasted (in the illumination of *Pessah Dorot*), is shown being brought to table by a figure who is not a servant but clearly one of the participants, since he holds a cup. Taken in context, this is no deviation but rather a deliberate indication to the viewer that this scene is meant to represent a Passover celebrated in the fullness of the redemptive era, replete with the reinstated Paschal sacrifice, which can only be partaken of by full-fledged members of

the community. The ram represented here is the constant element, the selfsame Paschal sacrifice that appears at four different junctures in history. Its first three manifestations are in its remote, typological past, at its historical etiology and on the occasion of its institution as a continuing ritual. It is absent in the present age in conformity with halakhic observance, only to resurface in the culminating moment of the reinstatement of the Paschal sacrifice in eschatological time.¹³

An understanding of the multiplex nature of Passover in the world of the patrons and/or illuminators of the manuscript, as well as its significance in the polemic assertion of the interpenetrability of time and the idea of the seder as a metahistorical observance, goes a long way toward resolving many “apparent inconsistencies” noted by scholars in the narrative sequence of the Birds’ Head Haggadah. I will now turn to the historical context and socioreligious climate behind the manuscript’s recourse to both its particular polemics and its assertion of metahistoricity.

THE HISTORICAL CLIMATE OF THE MANUSCRIPT’S CREATION

My reading of the illuminations of the Birds’ Head Haggadah has revealed in it a series of interconnected affirmations and polemics. There is a championing of the uniqueness, unconditionality, and eternity of the Jewish covenant, a confirmation of the direct and salvific providence of God for the Jewish people, and an assertion of a metahistoricity and redemptive power in the Passover seder that transcends and exceeds that of the eucharist. Additionally, the manuscript rejects Christian typologies that discount the Jewish historical narratives and observances as second-rate, abrogated, and ritualistic—mere foreshadowings of the eventual manifestations of Christian grace. Instead, they promote these historical narratives and observances, creating indigenous Jewish typologies to bolster them, confirm their antiquity, and assert their continuing relevance and salvific potential.

Hans Jaffé’s historical contextualization of the manuscript forms a good starting point for understanding the impetus behind these polemics. One might supplement his cogent and perceptive contributions with an emphasis on the situation of the Birds’ Head Haggadah in the post-Lateran IV climate of anti-Jewish legislation and action. The manuscript is presumed to have been created in Mainz, around 1300. For Jews in that place and time, the world was rhetorically (though not entirely rigidly, as I shall demonstrate) divided into hierarchical strata. The largest socioreligious division was the realm of Jewish life: the so-called four *’amot* of halakhah, the bounds of Jewish law, within which all of Jewish existence was regulated and governed. Abutting this world was the dominion of the gentiles—troped and imagined (though not necessarily experienced) as a totally separate universe; theoretically allowed to penetrate and to be interpenetrated by the Jewish realm to the extent necessary for the purposes of trade and livelihood; practically much more penetrable than the discourse of strictly separate universes admitted. Strict

ordinances on both sides regulated all manner of intercourse—social, intellectual, and sexual—between Jews and Christians. These separated Jew from gentile on two sides of a putatively unbroachable wall, but there were, as the latest scholarship demonstrates, gaps in this fortification that were often left deliberately unmended.¹⁴

Mainz in 1300 was, moreover, a time and place in Jewish history when the suffering of Egyptian bondage seemed very real, and redemption was dearly hoped and prayed for, not only because of the general medieval climate, as Jaffé suggests, but because of very specific circumstances. The strong push in legislation to distinguish Jews from Christians and to limit their interaction mirrored and accentuated the clear boundaries between Jewish and Christian culture already advocated in pietistic Jewish society. And the elevation of the status of the eucharist and the attendant theological emphasis on the sacrifice of the mass precipitated the host desecration libels, which, in turn, added to the intensification of eschatological hopes and desire for revenge in the Jewish community.

Though his historical contextualization was salutary, Jaffé's attempt to connect the "mood" of the manuscript with other German manuscripts of the period seems mistaken. If he is, in fact, correct in asserting that Christian visual culture in the German empire in 1300 evinces a lighthearted and playful mood, it is well to remember that such gaiety would have been born of the security that attended the consolidation of papal and imperial authority. Such reinforcement of power availed the Christian community. It theoretically fostered checks and balances that should have protected the Jews from the predations of *Ecclesia* and *Imperia*; yet it could, in specific localities and at particular times, generate a climate of even graver menace than had existed previously. With greater consolidation of power came the potential for more central, efficient, and vigorous promulgation of anti-Jewish doctrine and enforcement of legislation restricting Jews. When this potential was exercised, it could result in greater unity of popular sentiment against them. A paradoxical situation developed in which the Church repudiated Jewish doctrine and practice in the most unequivocal of terms, but was bound to protect Jews; and whereby the state also politically, socially, and commercially restricted Jews at the same time as it protected them. Church and state both condemned popular anti-Jewish rhetoric and mob violence in theory, but often did not—or could not—do much to stem them in reality. This situation could leave Jews feeling legitimately anxious, mistrusting, and fearful. It could also heighten their desire for redemption and their dreams of revenge.

It is difficult to imagine what Jaffé could have had in mind when he maintained that the "mood" of the Birds' Head Haggadah, a Jewish manuscript, is light and literal in imitation of the pervasive temper of Christian visual culture of the period. His assessment is both inconsistent with the facts of history and with the tenor of the illuminations.

Regardless of the charm or the humor the griffin heads evoke for some latter-day viewers, the manuscript's mood is highly serious and symbolically laden, and might be characterized as heavy were it not that the iconography represents a hopeful message with unambiguous clarity. The Birds' Head Haggadah is responsive to a particular context of history and *mentalités*, and the use of the griffin heads is not intended to be comic but to emphasize the lionlike nobility of the Jews in the face of difficulties, as well as their eaglelike transcendence of the vicissitudes of a painful constellation of historical circumstances.

JEWS AND OTHERS IN LIGHT OF THE HISTORICAL CLIMATE

The most distinctive characteristic of the Birds' Head Haggadah—the griffin-headed figures—emerges from the milieu of the rhetorical polarization of the world into the internal realm of the Jews and their halakhah and the external dominion of the gentiles. The impulse to efface the human countenance arises, as I have demonstrated, from an aniconic tendency within the halakhic realm. The means chosen to do so are more mythopoetic, with hierarchical distinctions made between griffin-headed Jews and blank-faced others. But the iconography gives rise to concrete halakhically driven results as well. A distinction is made between Jews and non-Jews in order to maintain an iconographic separation between their respective universes. At the same time, the very employment of the visual medium by Jews testifies to the practical interpenetrability of realms so dauntingly unbroachable in the rhetoric of intercommunal polemics. The very physical fact of their actual involvement in the commissioning of material artifacts like the Birds' Head Haggadah—their interest in illumination as a medium of expression (whether through mastery of the techniques of manuscript illumination or through taking the initiative to have manuscripts illuminated by non-Jews) and their adoption of symbols from a pool common in the culture they shared with Christians—shows that there was as much to draw the communities together as there was to keep them apart.

Thus, it seems clearly by design rather than by chance that the illumination of Jacob and Esau in their separate domains is the first narrative illustration of the entire work (plate 4). Jacob and Esau each sit on their own hilltops, separated by the gulf of the text, epitomizing the distinction between the Jewish and non-Jewish realms. But Esau's *Judenhut* speaks to their common origins, and the *bas-de-page* and several of the following folios likewise contravene a narrative of impenetrable separation: the story of Jews who are forced to leave their indigenous domain, and who find themselves within the purview of the non-Jewish other, making good (like Joseph) or being enslaved (like the Israelite laborers). Finally, they tell of those who deliberately go over to the dominion of the gentiles and work against the Jewish realm (Datan and Aviram). Because they are *malshinim* (speakers of evil against the Israelites, the community they have left behind),

the fate of such *mumarim* or *meshumadim* (apostates) is ultimately intertwined with that of the enemy; they are destined to be drowned in the sea along with their new associates.

The hierarchies that distinguish the various groups in the Birds' Head Haggadah reflect the distinction between the Jewish and non-Jewish realms so characteristic of the world of the manuscript's creation. But through its depiction of Jews who crossed the borders with non-Jewish society—court Jews, *servi camerae Regis*, and informers/converts—the iconography emphasizes that while so pervasive and so clearly bounded in theory and rhetoric, these hierarchies were flexible and penetrable in practice. While complete separation may have been a rhetorical ideal, in actuality, Jewish contact with the non-Jewish realm could be forced or sought after, and it could give rise to a spectrum of possible results, from temporal success to enslavement to cooptation.

Besides the issue of distinctions, hierarchies, and their flexibility, other major themes in the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, as well as in the relationship of Jews with God, are broached in the iconography of the Birds' Head Haggadah. These can be identified as *nekkhamot* (ideals of comfort), *nekamot* (dreams of subversion and revenge), and *ge'ulot* (visions of redemption), and it is these concepts I wish to examine in the next chapter.

6

Eschatological Hopes

I HAVE CONSIDERED THE MANNER in which the relationships between Jews and other Jews, and between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors are represented iconographically in the Birds' Head Haggadah. But the rich and complex iconographic configuration reveals what might be termed a theological outlook as well. Although two centuries had passed since the Crusade martyrdoms at Mainz, Jews remained scarred by the memory of those events. They continued to be victimized by intermittent but repeated violence in the wake of blood libels, ritual murder accusations, and host desecration allegations. They were also subjected to the continuing theological assault of Christianity on their status as *Verus Israel*. They craved reassurance that their relationship with God was eternal and unconditional, and they sought confirmation that ultimately, they, rather than the Christians, were the Chosen People, destined to achieve dominion in place of their enemies.

One of the wellsprings of solace in the tradition was the active linking of the present exile with both past glory and future redemption, which is repeatedly represented iconographically throughout the Birds' Head Haggadah. It is evident in the presentation of Moses' and Aaron's prayer in the "past continuous," as well as in the various assertions of the eternity and the efficacy of the Jewish covenant and of divine providence for the Jews, such as the salvation from the pursuit of Pharaoh, the passage through the Sea of Reeds, and the descent of manna and quails in the wilderness. The message in all these instances is clearly that God—to quote the text of *Lefikhakh*—"performed all these miracles for our ancestors *and for us*."¹ The images remind Jews that they must trust that God's mercy and providence will continue in the present circumstances, wretched as they may sometimes seem. There is also a reassertion of the Jewish status as *Verus Israel*: the chosenness of the Jews and their merit of salvation is demonstrated in the reclamation of indigenously Jewish motifs appropriated into Christian typology such as the *'Akedah* and *Pessah Mizrayim*. The Birds' Head Haggadah authorship reclaims these narratives to counter what it viewed as a false typological view of Jewish salvation history. The ideas of the unconditional love of God for the Jews, and their chosenness over Christians, are also bolstered by the counterappropriation of eucharistic visual metaphors to comment on the continuing salvific efficacy of *maḥaz* versus *hostia*, and by the use of the imagery of the Garden of Eden, where the righteous are greeted by Jewish patriarchs rather than by Christ and the saints. Finally, Israelite subjugation in Egypt (and by extension, Jewish

subjugation in medieval Ashkenaz) is vindicated by the reappropriation of the topos of the heavenly Jerusalem as a representation of the coming rebuilt and eschatological—though still earthly—Jerusalem.

Medieval Christianity viewed Judaism as a typological placeholder in the inevitable progress towards Christian redemption. In response, Jewish dreams of subversion and revenge take a subtle and unique form in the Birds' Head Haggadah.

NEKAMOT: DREAMS OF SUBVERSION AND REVENGE

The very configuration of the manuscript, with its distinction between noble, griffin-headed Jews and featureless (hence powerless) non-Jews, its rereading of Christian eucharistic topoi, and its exposé of mazah-baking practices, is subversive. But specifically vengeful imagery appears in only one context. In enumerating the illuminations present in later haggadot that are, according to his methodology, “expected” but not present in the Birds' Head Haggadah, Narkiss remarked upon the anticipated but lacking iconography of the ten plagues. If, as I maintain, the haggadah text reflects, *inter alia*, dreams of subversion and revenge, I would certainly expect to find images of Pharaoh struck with plagues among the iconography, since these are prime examples of wish-fulfillment iconography directed at the oppressors of Jews in the guise of the biblical Pharaoh. But one should not infer from the absence of that particular iconography that there is a lack of vengeful imagery or sentiment in the manuscript. The expression of subversive dreams is simply somewhat subtler here. The authorship did not have to depict Pharaoh struck by plagues to express its hope for *nekamah* (revenge). It was sufficient to show Pharaoh in the guise of the Holy Roman emperor in the scene of the pursuit of the Israelites because of the story's implied denouement: his drowning in the Sea of Reeds. The object lesson inherent in the image is intensified by the inclusion of apostates and informers, represented by Dan and Aviram, to imply a fate common to all who would seek to destroy Israel. This is, in fact, a more sophisticated, nonliteral type of subversive iconography than the explicit depictions of the plagues that appear in later haggadot in Ashkenaz and in Sepharad.

If the motif of vengeance is carried out only implicitly in the iconography, there is an interpolated textual addendum to the manuscript that is surprisingly explicit, and that—owing to its general rarity and the even rarer textual variation it contains—exemplifies for me the “mood” (to use Jaffé's word) of the manuscript more than any stylistic comparison with contemporary “lighthearted” Christian manuscripts. This somewhat startling midrashic passage is found in *Mahzor Vitry* and a few other sources, but it is unrecorded in any other illuminated haggadah. The text in question appears on folio 17, after the phrase, “I the LORD, and no other,” asserting God's absolute control over the process of redemption from Egypt.²

[17r] They said that when the Sovereign of the Universes descended in the midst of Egypt, there descended with Him ninety thousand myriads of Destroying Angels, among them Angels of Fire, among them Angels of Hail, among them Angels of Sweat, among them Angels of Trembling. And trembling and fear seized everyone who saw them. They said [17v] before Him, “Sovereign of the Universe, does not a king of flesh and blood whom you have created in your world, when he goes out to war, his officers and servants surround him so that his person will not be harmed? And you, King of the King of Kings, the Holy Blessed One, is it not fitting that we, your servants, of [or “and”]³ the children of your Covenant, should go down and wreak vengeance on Egypt?” [God] said to them: Leave me, for I will not be assuaged until I myself descend and wreak vengeance on Egypt.⁴

Other versions of the text have “is it not fitting since we [the angels] are your servants, and they [the Israelites] are the children of your Covenant, that we should go down and wreak vengeance on Egypt?”⁵ In those texts, the angels are offering to wreak vengeance on Egypt *instead* of the Israelites. There, the text has one of two meanings. It may be read as: “We are your servants (suitable for the “dirty work” of vengeance), and they are the children of your Covenant (who should not soil their hands with such tasks); therefore let us go and accomplish this task on their behalf.” Alternately, it might be interpreted as: “We are your servants (and our task is to serve You by serving them, for) . . . they are the children of your Covenant—therefore let us serve You in this way.” In either reading, the angels are clearly servants of God, and the People of Israel are the ones who are designated “the children of your Covenant.”

But in the version of this text in the Birds’ Head Haggadah, the angels apply to *themselves* the phrase ‘*avadekhah mi-bnei britekhah* (Your servants, the children of Your Covenant) presenting themselves as *surrogates* for the Children of Israel.⁶ The identity of the angels is, thus, elided with that of the Jews. In the other versions, the desire to wreak vengeance on Egypt is displaced upon the angels, and the Jews have no voice. Here, the Jews themselves are displaced, and there are only angels. But since the identity of the Jews is elided with that of the angels—who speak as “Your servants, the children of Your Covenant”—one can, in effect, hear the voices of the Jews themselves, pleading that it should be their role to wreak vengeance on the Egyptians. It is significant that this midrash—deemed so questionable and inappropriate by some—appears in a manuscript wherein the identity of Jews is visually connected to and elided with a cherubic topos, and is purposely adjusted to elide the identity of Jews and angels in a manner that parallels what is done in the illustrations.

One can clearly hear in the imagined exchange between the angels/Israel and God the frustration of medieval Jews like those who commissioned this manuscript, dreaming of

being in a position to defend both God's honor and their own persons by avenging themselves on their Christian persecutors. But the authoritative voice—the very voice of God, in fact (sounding, as usual, suspiciously like the voice of rabbinic authority)—intervenes to suppress such vengeful dreams. This midrash validates the expression of an objection to the status quo while, at the same time, presenting a justification for quietism and forbidding any action to overthrow the system. It straddles the thin line between the enforcement of doctrine and doctrinal error.

As I have emphasized, in the case of the haggadah text, often what is not said—the lack of a spotlight upon Moses, or the uprooting of the Exodus narrative from the center of the written text in favor of the Deuteronomy verses—can be most telling. It is likewise revealing when an element is silenced or repressed in a text connected with the haggadah, as the angels'/Jews' dream of subversion is stifled here. But adding to the fascination of this highly political text are the marginal notes upon it, which appear before and after the passage in a slightly later but roughly contemporary hand. The note on folio 17r, at the beginning of the passage, says, "We do not say this." And the one after the passage, on folio 17v, reads, "Until here, an error." This confirms that the midrash, while acceptable to the authorship, seemed outrageous to someone who owned the haggadah perhaps a single generation after it was written. But margins are the locus of commentary, reflecting back upon the text. Thus, issues of "what we say" and "what we do not say"—delineating error from doctrine—are played out most compellingly within their bounds. Revenge fantasies are here given explicit voice, but they are suppressed instantaneously, almost simultaneously, and authoritatively. The suppression occurs within the midrashic stratum itself (via the transference of the vengeful fantasies of the biblical Israelites/contemporary Jews onto the angels). It is repeated in these annotations on the manuscript. Finally, it is echoed in Goldschmidt's silence about the passage in his essay accompanying the facsimile volume, even though he writes about it elsewhere, in more obscure scholarly contexts. Goldschmidt's failure to engage the content of such an extraordinary and disturbing midrash is the modern equivalent of the marginal note that maintains that "we do not say this," perpetuating the silencing of this quirky text.⁷

What is most fascinating here is that in spite of the admonitions not to recite it (indicating that for some audiences, the text clearly fomented great discomfort) the offending midrash was never actually effaced or erased. And it is perhaps symbolically appropriate that, like the Christian censor's ink in many Hebrew books and manuscripts, the ink in which the internal bowdlerization of the marginal interdiction was inscribed has faded while the subversive and vengeful letters of the midrashic text remain dark and legible.

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GE'ULOT: HOPE FOR REDEMPTION

The text of the Birds' Head Haggadah is interesting in terms of many of its variations from what later became the dominant Ashkenazic liturgical configuration. Goldschmidt, to his credit as a philologist, traced these variations to earlier manuscripts and to assorted variant traditions. But the philological approach to liturgy shares similar deficiencies with the archaeological approach to iconography: its concern with origins and originary strata has a tendency to blind one to the ways in which the text might have been received in its specific context, particularly when illuminations are a part of the total picture. For example, in the Birds' Head Haggadah text, God's calculation of the *kez*—the end of the period of exile (Egyptian, but also implicitly the present)—is rendered in the present tense on folio 12r. Thus, God is anticipating (*meḥashev*, the end of the exile),⁸ as opposed, in the standard text, to having anticipated (*ḥishev*) it in the past.⁹ Or, in the paragraph praising God's steadfastness with regard to the covenant, it states that “more than a single nation *stands* against us to finish us off,” a present-tense variant of “more than a single nation *stood* against us to finish us off.”¹⁰ Each of these variant readings is occasionally testified in other manuscripts and traditions, but the fact that the Birds' Head Haggadah held on to these older and foreign locutions at a time when Ashkenazic liturgical tradition was beginning to coalesce may indicate a tendency in the text of the manuscript (parallel to the similar penchant in the iconography) to amplify the feelings of immediacy and contemporary relevance both of God's promise and of the oppression of the nations. This is an enactment—in word and in image—of the admonition with which this study began: “In each and every generation, one is required to view oneself as if one had personally come forth from Egypt.”

SINGING OF REDEMPTION

On the obverse of the final leaf of the manuscript is a text that seems to be in the same cursive hand that penned some of the longer halakhic comments in the margins of the book (plate 25).¹¹ This text is configured in two columns: the left-hand column containing forty-four lines, the right-hand column with forty-six. Following a caption that appears at the head of the right-hand column, the first three lines of each column are devoted to a *siman*—a mnemonic—written in slightly larger block letters. This is an “order of the seder” authored by a poet whose name appears in the acrostic as Ya'akov but whose more specific identity is unknown. The bulk of the text follows these six lines and comprises an anonymous poetic commentary that expands upon and interprets the terse and laconic mnemonic. Following the anonymous poetic commentary is a second commentary on the *siman*—this one halakhic in nature, and apparently incomplete. Like the midrash on folios 17r–17v, the text on this folio is again transcribed but not translated by Goldschmidt, perhaps because it is a later addition to the manuscript. For me, however, it

is significant: having been added by one of the authors of the marginal notes, it is part of the chain of the reception of the volume and may provide some hints about how the book was perceived by its receptive audience.¹²

Goldschmidt describes the opening caption as constituting “verse-instructions for ‘the preparation of the ceremony of Passover Eve.’” If the opening caption is translated according to this interpretation, it reads: “Here you have three lines which R. Ya’akov, of blessed memory, wrote and from them everyone may prepare (*yakhin*) the entire order of Passover eve.” However, close examination of the script fails to reveal whether the caption should read *yakhin* (“prepare”), making this primarily a halakhic text, or whether the caption reads *yavin* (“understand”), which would indicate that although it may be a halakhic instructional text, the mnemonic is first and foremost a key to understanding the *meaning* of the seder. A reading of Goldschmidt’s *yakhin* as *yavin* yields, “Here you have three lines which R. Ya’akov, of blessed memory, wrote and from them everyone may understand (*yavin*) the entire order of Passover eve.”

Goldschmidt preferred to read the mnemonic in the first way, as a halakhic instructional text, perhaps because it is clear that the bulk of the second commentary relates to R. Ya’akov’s mnemonic in a halakhic way. Nevertheless, Goldschmidt alludes to the fact that this is a double commentary; it is “of two kinds, one explaining the verses, and the other the mnemonic signs according to the ceremony.” He adds that “the second was written after an entreaty by the commentator’s friend R. Ephraim ben Shlomo.” Here is a translation of the caption, the mnemonic, and the introduction to each of the commentaries:

[Caption]

Here you have three lines, which R. Ya’akov of blessed memory wrote and from them everyone may prepare [understand] the entire seder of Passover eve.

[Mnemonic]

My beloved vine, be sanctified by the Living One

And exalt the sprigs of my land

Uproot the conflict and sequester my opponents

As a sign to your vineyard remove it by your hand

Swiftly have mercy on the eaters of bitterness

Remember the sanctuary, sustain me in my oppression.

[Introduction to the first commentary]

And here is the literal meaning . . .

[End of the first commentary]

This concludes the literal meaning, understanding [the mnemonic] as a prayer . . .

[Introduction to the second commentary]

The commentary according to the understanding of [the mnemonic as a guide to] the seder, interpreted according to my paucity of understanding, for I had neither a teacher nor a study companion with whom to work upon it. Truly, the beloved of my soul R. Ephraim son of the illustrious Shlomo prevailed upon me to interpret it. And love distorts the natural order of things. Therefore I steeled myself [lit., “made my face like flint”], and set my countenance to write it—to combine in it [the commentary] the opinions of the great [sages], as I found them written explicitly here and there—with signs of clarification, their opinions and their interpretations. And I will collect them [and I will collect them/diplography] and will combine them together [and] with the help of Him who is called “One.”

These introductions specify that the genre of the first commentary is poetic. It is labeled at its beginning and end as the *pshat*, the “literal” or “contextual” meaning of the mnemonic. Like most *piyyut* commentaries, it is anonymous. It does not appear to be a compilation, although the *siman* commented upon is so rare that no other commentaries on which it might be drawing are known. On the basis of its style, Elisabeth Hollender ascribes it to northern France or Ashkenaz in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. The commentary treats the *siman* as a *piyyut* and consists of a *piyyut* commentary of normative form with many typical elements. It is composed chiefly of linguistic explications, some of them employing biblical prooftexts, and includes some paraphrases of poetical units. Hollender asserts that by reading the mnemonic as a poem, this commentary advertises to its audience that its lines have a poetic value beyond their practical use as a mnemotechnic device. She notes that the use of the term “*pshat*” is striking, because it can be paraphrased as “if we read these few lines as a *text*, this is what they say,” whereas the use of the text as *mnemonic* requires one to deconstruct the text and look at the ritual (secondary) meaning of some words, which is exactly what happens in the second commentary.¹³

This second commentary is introduced by a long apologium in which the author explains that he wrote it only after his friend R. Ephraim b. Shlomo prevailed upon him to do so, and that it was somehow an unnatural task that came about because “love distorts the natural order of things,” a midrashic allusion that I investigate below.¹⁴ Like a good many Ashkenazic and Tsarfatic *piyyut* commentaries of this period, it is a compilation of multiple sources and, accordingly, almost impossible to ascribe to a

particular author. The commentary seems to be incomplete, but among the authors cited in the surviving lines of the commentary is R. Jacob of Orleans and a certain unidentified R. Meir.¹⁵

Double commentaries on *piyyut* are not unheard of, and the two in this manuscript certainly don't contradict each other. But the two commentaries raise interesting questions: Why wasn't the first poetic/*pshatic* explication of the mnemonic sufficient? Why did R. Ephraim b. Shlomo have to prevail upon the diffident author to pen a second interpretation? Why was the author so reluctant to write it, and why does he represent it as a distortion of the natural order of things? At first glance, the answers appear simple: the *siman* is a mnemonic for the "signs" or "steps" in the halakhic order of the seder—it requires interpretation at the halakhic level, so R. Ephraim is justified in calling for such interpretation. But while one finds esoteric, ethical, exegetical, and even linguistic interpretations derived from *piyyut*, *piyyut* commentary generally does not apply itself to halakhah. Thus, the author's consternation about composing this commentary seems to arise from the fact that halakhic commentary is extremely unusual. In reading the *siman* as a halakhic text rather than as a poetic one, the author of the second commentary is being asked to make the unusual intervention of deriving halakhah from *piyyut*.¹⁶

On one level, the discomfort of the author of the second commentary is about the tension between a common genre and a rare genre. On another level, the author's concern may also be about particular content. I will examine the first commentary (which contains "the literal meaning, understanding [the mnemonic] as a prayer") for some clues as to why R. Ephraim was moved to prevail upon his friend to write such an unusual halakhic commentary, as well as some explanation for why the compiler of the manuscript asserts that the poetic commentary remains the *pshat*, in spite of the second, halakhic, exegesis:

He [R. Ya'kov] prays concerning Israel who stands in exile, and says, "*My beloved vine*"—Israel which is called a vine, as it is said, "And I have planted you as a shoot of total righteousness, and how have you turned unto me into a sprig of the alien vine."¹⁷

Be sanctified by the Living One: The Holy Blessed One, who is the life of the worlds, will sanctify that same vine, in other words, Israel.

And exalt the sprigs of my land: Exalt, as in he will lift them up and bear them forever, like "and forbearing."¹⁸

sprigs: As in "and behold a sprig of olive in her mouth,"¹⁹ from the language of leaves, in other words, he will exalt and raise up the leaves of my land—this is the Land of Israel.

Uproot the conflict and sequester my opponents: In other words, uproot the conflict of the nations of the world, and sequester and hide away my enemy who wages war upon me.

By signs to your vineyard remove it by your hand: The interpretation is Israel, who are called “your vineyard” as it is said, “The House of Israel is a vineyard of the LORD of hosts.”²⁰

By signs: With signs and with a strong hand, release her from the exile.

Have mercy on all the eaters of bitterness: The interpretation is, you who together taste bitterness among the nations (concerning whom it says, “and they embittered their lives, etc.”),²¹ and may You [God] have mercy and pity upon them.

Remember the sanctuary: That they may be heard [or “that they may be saved”; text is defective].

Sustain me in my oppression: The interpretation is “sustain me in my exile and in my oppression.”

The *siman* is a highly poetic mnemonic that has very little apparent relationship to the order of Passover eve. The commentary understands the *siman* to be full of allusion, susceptible to interpretation on the symbolic level. Thus it emphasizes elements of *nekhamot*, *nekamot*, and *ge'ulot*—expressions of desire for revenge against the rapacious nations alongside visions of comfort and ultimate redemption for Israel that mirrors the iconography in the body of the manuscript. Granted, the anti-Christian invective here is not particularly unusual and is, in fact, rather veiled compared to some of the later French *piyyut* commentaries—but in the environment I have posited for the creation of the Birds' Head Haggadah, one of pressure and tension between Jews and Christians, as evident throughout the iconography—anti-Christian sentiments even so relatively mild as these might have precipitated strong feelings of two kinds: such a poetic, allusive, and politically charged interpretation would have been esteemed and beloved by some Jews, but it might have aroused concern in others.²²

Like R. Ephraim, such Jews might have worried about a commentary that called (however obliquely) for the destruction of the “enemy who wages war upon me.” While it was unlikely that even a clever Hebrew-literate friar or an apostate working to collect evidence against the Jews could have charged them with insubordination on the basis of the dense poetry and vague allusion of the *siman* itself, the more explicit poetic commentary was another matter. Better, R. Ephraim perhaps supposed, to bury the poetic commentary (a mere twenty-three lines) within the overwhelming bulk of the halakhic

interpretation (some sixty lines plus at least one further missing folio) that would both avail Jewish readers and throw hostile Christians and their allies off the scent.

The second commentary that R. Ephraim begged from his friend is described as a distortion of the natural order of things both because halakhic commentaries as such are rare and unusual, and because the author's habitual reticence was transformed into boldness by the request of a beloved friend.

Though it is tempting to view the distinction between the two commentaries as being between esoteric (poetic) and exoteric (halakhic) modes of interpretation, the difference lies more properly simply between the realm of the poetic and that of the halakhic. After all, the ostensibly more esoteric poetic commentary is described as *pshat*. And, even in the halakhic commentary, there are symbolic elements that are relevant vis-à-vis the haggadah illuminations and their context. These not only tie the *siman* to the ritual of the seder, but they also serve to explain how the commentator and his circle understood some of the elements of the ritual.

For instance, the commentary indicates that “it is necessary to make a sign as to which [mazah] was made first, and which second, and which third, and then he should place them in the dish according to the order of their making. The third will be the lowest, the second in the middle, and the first on top.” The appearance of the “sign” made on the mazot (a single, double, or triple thumb-sized protrusion on the circumference of the mazah in question) is evident in the illuminations on folios 28r, 28v, and 29r.²³

Even more striking is the halakhic commentary's insistence on the bloodlike consistency of the *ḥarosset*, the condiment placed on the seder plate as one of the ritual foods and generally understood to be “in memory of the mortar” that the enslaved Israelites were forced to form into bricks. According to an apparently lost midrash quoted by Ḥizkuni (Ḥizkiya ben Manoah, France, d. 1270), the mortar was mixed literally with the blood of the Israelites as they labored. The Israelites, refused straw for building by Pharaoh, had to gather stubble in the wilderness and tread clay into it. The coarse stubble pierced their heels, mingling their blood with the clay.²⁴ The directions here highlight the necessity of emphasizing the bloodlike aspect of *ḥarosset*: “And he should take a bit from the *ḥarosset* and place it in a small dish and put in the dish a bit of wine and mix it well, until it becomes thin, for the commandment is to make it thick at the beginning in memory of the bricks, but afterwards, we make it thin in memory of the blood.” In other words, this action is a performative midrash demonstrating the double meaning of *ḥarosset*. “The commandment” is to make the condiment thick in memory of the bricks formed by the enslaved Israelites.²⁵ The custom of the commentator's circle was to then temper it with wine (“we make it thin in memory of the blood”). This dilution was apparently so important that the following directive was added: “And if the first night

falls on Shabbat, one must be careful to dilute the *ḥarosset* while it is yet day because he will not be able to do it on Shabbat.”

Obviously, the symbolism of blood (the blood spilled in slavery, the blood of the Paschal lamb, or the blood of the covenant) was central to this community, which had also experienced bloody martyrdoms and persecutions. This connects with the illustration of the Passover sacrifice on folio 21r (see figs. 27, 40; plate 10), which contains the only actual depiction of blood in the manuscript. This scene is very clear in depicting the sacrificial victim as an animal, and, as has been observed, the illuminations answer the accusation of the use of Christian blood in the manufacture of *mazot* (plates 17, 18). But the poetic commentary confirms the undeniable significance of blood in connection with Passover in general, and for the manuscript’s audience in particular. The emphasis on blood is consistent with its centrality in Ashkenazic culture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Medieval Ashkenazic Jews inherited from the rabbis the idea that redemption is connected with the blood of circumcision and the blood of Passover sacrifice. After the Crusade martyrdoms of 1096, the blood of martyrdom becomes similarly indispensable.²⁶

Thus, in the exoteric and more public illustrations, the significance of blood is circumscribed or denied, but in the more esoteric commentary, intended for an elite and knowing internal audience, it is acknowledged and emphasized.²⁷

FROM URZEIT TO ENDZEIT

Like the poem on the flyleaf, the final illumination of the manuscript is singularly relevant to the idea of *ge’ulah* in the manuscript. It encompasses two adjacent folia: at right (plate 23), a beardless griffin-headed man in a *Judenhut* holds up the seder’s final cup of blessing as he faces to the right, while another young man, turning left, raises his hand in the direction of the left-hand page as if to call the celebrant’s attention to the action on that page. There, four beardless figures wearing traveling cloaks point upward, their index fingers extended to an elaborate Gothic building with two towers surmounted by figures of birds. Within the pointed archway, a fifth beardless figure beckons or greets them.

The figures in this scene constitute the manuscript’s last depiction of “displaced Jews.” But these Jews are not displaced from the community; they are, rather, displaced from the present historical reality—they exist in what was hoped to be an immediately impending redemptive eschatological moment. These figures illustrate the ultimate, culminating statement of the haggadah text.

The scene is a recapitulation of the image of Jacob leading his family into Egypt on folio 12r (plate 4), with certain key alterations. The celebrant’s attention is in the present, and he faces the direction of the text, which the seder participants have just

completed. But the smaller figure attempts to turn his (and their) attention toward the immediate future, as depicted on the facing page. The illustration of Jacob's descent into Egypt depicts a patriarch in a traveling cloak and six younger figures, symbolizing the seventy souls going down to Egypt—into Exile—with an eighth figure, Joseph, “already in Egypt.” By way of contrast, in this final illustration of redemption—the twin of and response to the illumination of the descent into Exile—there are four traveling-cloaked figures. These represent Jews gathered from the “four corners of the Earth” to come to Jerusalem, just as they had been “redeemed . . . from slavery to freedom” in the Exodus.²⁸ The fifth figure, without a traveling cloak, mirrors Joseph in the “exilic” illumination (plate 4, center left) and is meant to symbolize the Jewish community already in Zion. In contrast to the archaizing (Romanesque) architecture used to represent Egypt as Joseph's dwelling place, which casts the action as having occurred in antiquity, Jerusalem is here depicted in the Gothic style, implying immediacy and currency.²⁹ Jerusalem's bird-topped pinnacles recall the cherubs of the Ark of the Covenant and the promise of the restoration of divine presence in the world that is to be. All the figures in this illumination are young (unbearded), implying the relevance of the dream of restoration to the current generation. The illustration presents in visual language the sense of the culminating statement of the haggadah it illustrates. This text, *Le-shanah ha-ba'ah b'Irushalayim*, is often rendered as “Next Year in Jerusalem.” But its accurate translation is “Within the coming year, [may we be] in Jerusalem,” making the wish not an interminably deferrable one—perpetually set in the eternally elusive “next year,” but an active longing for immediate redemption.

This image also crowns my analysis of the *Judenhut* as symbol of identity and agent of distinction rather than sign of infamy; this time not because of its absence but because of its presence. The hats in this scene raise a question: If this is an image of redemption and restoration, why are the figures all provided with Jewish hats? Does it make sense that in a redeemed Jerusalem, Jews would be required to wear a sign of disgrace? Certainly not—if the illuminators viewed the hat as a badge of infamy. But it does make sense that Jews would depict themselves with the *Judenhut* if, in the context of this manuscript, it was not a symbol of ignominy but a way of identifying Jews fully within the community, and distinguishing them from more marginal Jews.

The final image of the Birds' Head Haggadah is an image of continuity. Bearded patriarchs initiated the process of redemption, but it is their children who will return, redeemed, to Zion. There is anxiety in the tradition about whether the final redemption will abrogate the law and bring about an antinomian state.³⁰ In spite of the assertion of some Jewish and all Christian sources that the Jews will be redeemed from the “burden of the Law” at the *eschaton*, this illumination insists on continuity with the Sinaitic covenant by illustrating the retention of the symbols of Jewish uniqueness even in the climate of eschatological redemption. This is the authorship's reading of the rabbinic assertion that

“there will be no difference between the current age and the Messianic Era except for [our emancipation from our] subjugation to the nations”³¹: there will be no difference between these times and messianic times *with respect to the observance of the Torah*, even when the Jews are freed from the yoke of the nations. If a Jew is a Jew “*af’al pi she-ḥoteh*” (even when sinning), so too is a Jew a Jew “*af’al pi she-nig’al*” (even when redeemed).

Joseph in Egypt may have lost touch with his identity and thus—in the symbolic world of the illuminators—lost his hat. Yet the redeemed Jews (not of a future, but of the current generation) exceed even Joseph the Righteous in their piety. The illuminators of the manuscript certainly understood what the rabbis meant when they asserted that “there is no difference between these times and messianic times save our servitude to the nations.” But it is obvious that they considered the *Judenhut* less a symbol of servitude than an indicator of cohesion to the community; hence, curiously enough, as a sign of redeemedness. In the ideal redeemed world of the Birds’ Head Haggadah, all the protagonists are young and vigorous, a new generation that survived the indignities of its servitude to the Christian Pharaoh not only intact but with a sense of identity, hope, and pride.

If one reads the *Judenhut* as an ironic sign of redeemedness, this takes the last illustration of *Le-shanah ha-ba’ah b’Irushalayim* back full circle, so that it also serves to illustrate one of the earliest statements of the haggadah: *Le-shanah ha-ba’ah be-’ar’ah de-Yisra’el... bnei ḥorin* (In the coming year in the Land of Israel... free people). Ironically, it is true *bnei ḥorin* (free or redeemed people) who are distinguished by the infamous hat.³²

All this talk of redemption is appropriate in a manuscript that is literally framed by references to *ge’ulah* in text, in poetry, and in iconography. One finds a touching desire to see this theme as pervasive in the late Dr. Moshe Spitzer’s rather headlong rush to interpret Mordechai Narkiss’s transcription of some inscriptions discovered on the flyleaf of the manuscript when it was rebound. Spitzer, the publisher of the facsimile, and a man clearly under the spell of the manuscript (for which I cannot blame him), enthuses that one of the inscriptions deciphered by Narkiss reads: “This book of Redemption belonged to Shimsh’ on Bibatz.”³³

In fact, the transcription of the Hebrew by Narkiss reads “*Zeh ha-sefer ga’al/(tear) sheli zeh/(tear) Shimsh’ on Bibaz, BAB”D.*” This translates as “[So-and-so] redeemed this book (*tear*)/It is (now) mine:/(*tear*) Shimsh’ on Bibaz, son of the Head of the Court of [So-and-so]” an inscription typical of flyleaf annotations noting the redemption of books from pawnbrokers. This more accurate translation transforms the image of Shimsh’ on Bibaz from that of a high-minded art connoisseur with a deep understanding of the central message of the Birds’ Head Haggadah into someone who appreciated the book mostly as a commodity. But all is not lost. The inscription makes it clear that Bibaz

treasured the manuscript, regardless of the reason. He certainly cared enough about it to buy it back from whatever dark slavery it had fallen into, an appropriate gesture of redemption for a book in which *ge'ulah*—redemption—plays such a dominant role.³⁴

“The Book of Redemption” is certainly a striking way to describe the Birds’ Head Haggadah. But even though this cognomen derives from a blatant misreading, as a characterization it is neither illegitimate nor excessive. It accurately reflects that the most salient feature of this haggadah is *not* the putative birds’ heads at all but its driving focus on redemption. This central and pervasive theme is expressed at all its levels, textual as well as iconographical. One can certainly understand how “love distorts the natural order,” and how Dr. Spitzer’s normally acute philological and bibliographical instincts were outflanked by his wishful thinking. It seems natural that he might have fantasized that another keeper of this wonderful manuscript, somewhere in the generations that had preceded him, had called this book that he so treasured and in which I continue to find such depth of meaning “The Book of Redemption.”

THE GOLDEN HAGGADAH

London, BL Add. MS 27210,
Catalonia, 1320–1330



PLATE 26 Golden Haggadah, fol. 2r



PLATE 28 Golden Haggadah, fol. 3r



PLATE 27 Golden Haggadah, fol. 2v



PLATE 30 Golden Haggadah, fol. 5r



PLATE 29 Golden Haggadah, fol. 4v

וְהָיָה בְּעֵת הַפֶּסַח

וְהָיָה בְּעֵת הַפֶּסַח

וְהָיָה בְּעֵת הַפֶּסַח



וְהָיָה בְּעֵת הַפֶּסַח

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וְהָיָה בְּעֵת הַפֶּסַח

PLATE 32 Golden Haggadah, fol. 7r



PLATE 31 Golden Haggadah, fol. 6v



PLATE 34 Golden Haggadah, fol. 9r



PLATE 33 Golden Haggadah, fol. 8v



PLATE 36 Golden Haggadah, fol. 11r



PLATE 35 Golden Haggadah, fol. 10v



PLATE 38 Golden Haggadah, fol. 13r



PLATE 37 Golden Haggadah, fol. 12v



PLATE 40 Golden Haggadah, fol. 15r



PLATE 39 Golden Haggadah, fol. 14v



PLATE 41 Linear (top) and chiasmic (bottom) readings of the Golden Haggadah, fols. 2v-3r

THE BIRDS' HEAD HAGGADAH was obviously planned by a highly sophisticated authorship. The erudite way in which that authorship responded to and manipulated iconographic elements present in the wider culture overturns old assumptions that medieval Jews simply and uncritically emulated "Christian" visual culture, conforming to its set iconographic patterns. The breathtaking boldness of the appropriation of motifs and the painstaking subtlety of their adaptation makes it clear that Jews were inventing a parallel iconography rather than "sloppily copying" or "misunderstanding the model." But while a closer look at the Birds' Head Haggadah helps implode these assumptions, many other preconceptions about medieval Jewish manuscript illumination remain, particularly concerning manuscripts that are deemed somehow not to "look Jewish."

One of the great lessons of the historiography of Jewish manuscript illumination over the past couple of decades has been that, in light of the pervasive division of labor in manuscript production, it cannot blithely be assumed that because the language of a manuscript is Hebrew, it was necessarily illuminated by a Jew. Jews clearly commissioned the manuscripts considered here, and the texts they contain were most likely calligraphed by Jewish scribes. But the question of the religious identification of the artists of the illuminations still, legitimately, haunts the field. Naturally I am interested in ascertaining as much as I can about the illuminators. I want to know what their background was; where, how, and with whom they got their training, and if they made any unique contribution on the basis of that background and training to the overall conception of the manuscript, either in consultation with the patrons or (less likely, but still intriguing to consider) on their own. Although it would be interesting and enlightening to have this information, in the vast majority of cases it is unavailable. And in the rush to be able to say something about the illuminators, scholars have used stylistic evidence and evidence of aesthetic "quality" to adduce the religious identity of a given manuscript's illuminators. In such evaluations Jewishness is generally deemed to exist in inverse proportion to the overall aesthetic quality of the manuscripts in question. For example, some scholars have judged the illuminations of the Birds' Head Haggadah to be crude and bizarre and have found the manuscript's arrangement confusing and haphazard. The overall "inferior quality" of the work, along with the fact that it was created in Ashkenaz during a period when some believe it would have been unusual for Christians to be working for Jews, are factors that confirm for some that it must be the work of Jewish hands.¹

But with regard to the illumination of books for Jews in Spain, where the aesthetic quality is often high, where one rarely encounters such quirky elements as zoocephalism, and where there had been, during the *mudejar* period, a tradition of *convivencia*, historians of Jewish visual culture have tended to underscore and accentuate the apparent stylistic and iconographic similarities between Jewish and Christian manuscripts. Ironically, the highest compliment that could be paid to the illumination of Jewish manuscripts in Spain by the previous generation of researchers was to describe it as being devoid of all but the most superficial Jewish elements. The more a given “Hebrew illuminated manuscript” resembled those in the surrounding culture, the more highly it was valued. This precipitous leap of the imagination served to obviate the possibility of Jewish illuminators simply because the manuscripts were deemed to “look too good” to have been created by Jews.²

The work perhaps most celebrated for the prominence of its “non-Jewish elements” is the so-called Golden Haggadah, written and illuminated possibly in Barcelona between 1320 and 1330, and now Add. MS 27210 in the British Library. In this exquisite work the haggadah text is prefaced by a cycle of eight folia of illuminations depicting events from the books of Genesis and Exodus. Though the scribes of the Golden Haggadah were clearly Jews, and the iconography of these folia is full of midrashic elements, much of the scholarly attention focused upon it in fact accrued to it by virtue of its pervasive resemblance to contemporary Christian illumination. For many scholars it was simply axiomatic that the “high quality of the illuminations . . . and their stylistic resemblance to royal books of the period . . . imply that the Haggadah was illuminated by a secular Christian craftsman.”³

On the surface, this assumption is reasonable. This is, after all, a haggadah in which haloed angels and a Pharaoh bedecked in the trappings of a medieval Spanish monarch (plate 35, top right, bottom left) compete for attention with realistic scenes of Passover preparation in medieval Spanish Jewish interiors (plate 40, bottom right). While the latter are clearly indigenously Jewish images, can the same be said so unequivocally about the former? One might easily construe these images as having merely been adopted wholesale from the art of the majority culture.

Such apparent similarities with contemporary Christian iconography have lulled researchers into assuming that the entirety of the manuscript is framed by the “conventions” of Christian visual culture. And on the surface the manuscript does seem to be thus framed. But I would assert, first of all, that the frame is not intrinsically “Christian.” Rather, the configuration of the manuscript represents an aesthetic shared by Jews and Christians in early fourteenth-century Catalonia. And at junctures where it draws on motifs that are explicitly and indisputably based in Christian scripture or doctrine, the iconography, in fact, exists in tension with its frame, and responds to—rather than parrots—Christian conventions in an indigenously Jewish manner.

The cycle of seven bifolia of illumination that introduces the haggadah opens with Adam's naming of the animals in Genesis 2:20 and continues through the song of Miriam and the women of Israel at the Sea of Reeds in Exodus 15:20. Researchers have generally understood these illustrations to be literal renderings of the scriptural narratives, enhanced by occasional recourse to midrashic material.⁴ These biblical scenes are followed by three vignettes generally described as depictions of "contemporary Passover preparations." But I find the final image to be somewhat ambiguous, containing elements that could be contemporary but that also might point to a future Passover in a redeemed world with a rebuilt Temple: that Passover which, in the case of the Birds' Head Haggadah, I termed *Pessah Ge'ulah* (fig. 43; plate 40, lower left).

The general organizing principle of the illuminations has always been considered simply to follow the sequence of scriptural events. But is a linear sequential recapitulation of the events of Genesis and Exodus necessarily the best or the only way to introduce the text of the haggadah? Close readers have long understood the Passover haggadah to be hypertextual, a rich repository of carefully structured and cross-referenced information, with subtle connections between *ba-yamim ha-hem* ("in those days" or "once upon a time," what Eliade called *illo tempore*) and *z'man ha-zeh* (in "our" times) woven in and out of its framework.⁵

No one would dispute the fact that in early fourteenth-century Catalonia both Jewish and Christian religious literature and poetry were multifaceted and nuanced. Christian visual culture of this period is acknowledged to be complex, polyvalent, and rich in historical, political, and religious allusion. Designers, artists, and religious consultants, asked to give visual substance to the Christian understanding of a sacred text in a manuscript of similar quality to the Golden Haggadah but illuminated for Christians in this period, would certainly have disappointed their patrons by taking an unsophisticated, literal, and strictly linear approach to the text.

The text of the Passover haggadah is replete with sophisticated religious ideas concerning the interpenetrability of time and the role of divine providence and covenantal promise in history. It is acutely susceptible to contemporary political interpretation. Given that the haggadah is at least as complex, intricate, and elaborately structured as any Christian text, it would make sense that the patrons of the Golden Haggadah—early fourteenth-century Catalonian Jews who were very much attuned to contemporary trends both aesthetic and intellectual, and who also, no doubt, understood the multivalent nature of the haggadah text—would have demanded in the iconography of the manuscript they commissioned a sophistication worthy of the text it contained and the metanarrative it evoked. I will argue that whether it was Jews or Christians who actually put pen and brush to parchment, their commission assured that the patrons received such a manuscript, and that these rich and detailed Jewish illuminations can, in fact, be

read as relating to each other in a complex and exciting manner worthy of the hypertextuality of the haggadah itself.

Katrin Kogman-Appel has recently substituted a more serious consideration of the role of midrashic elements in the illuminations of the Golden Haggadah for the rather tendentious consideration of style or “quality” that has hitherto been the basis of determining the level of Jewish involvement in planning and executing its illuminations. She has argued that the employment of midrash places the authorship in a specific—and distinctively Jewish—intellectual milieu. She has meticulously traced and revealed the iconographic sources of the illuminations, and has clearly and comprehensively listed the midrashic elements that appear within individual scenes. But her analysis rarely ventures into the realm of the interpretation of the possible *meaning* of the midrashic elements for the authorship or audience of the manuscript, which, to my mind, is the crux of the matter.

My intention here is to titrate the particular ideological, theological, philosophical, historiosophical, political, or social agendas of the authorship of the manuscript from its iconography. I will do this by considering the meaning of the midrashic elements both in the context of the particular illuminations in which they appear and in the way those illuminations—and hence the midrashic elements they contain—are disposed across each folio, each bifolium, and the sequence of illuminations as a whole. I seek to determine whether all of those midrashic elements, taken together, evince an overall midrashic sensibility, and if so, what exegetical agendas might be promoted by that sensibility. As in my reading of the Birds’ Head Haggadah, I will not argue that the images contained in the first seven bifolia of the Golden Haggadah were planned by the authorship or “read” by the original audience exactly as I interpret them here. Once again, I mean only to suggest a set of possible readings to facilitate imagining this document in a more nuanced way.

BREAKING OUT OF THE LINEAR NARRATIVE

Looking carefully at the illuminations, I note some interesting formal connections between them, confluences that indicate that, rather than existing in isolation, each illumination (like each element in the haggadah text) exists in relationship with the others and with the series of illuminations as a whole. These relationships are evident first in the composition of the illuminations: although the expected progression in following the sequence of illustrations is to move one’s eye from right to left, upper register to lower register (plate 41, top), there are elements in the physical design of the illuminations and in the rhythm of the folios that are intentionally distracting, drawing the eye in other directions (plate 41, bottom). Prominent verticals repeat in illustrations that confront each other across the page, for instance. Scenes mirror one another across a span of folia, and visual and iconographic motifs repeat themselves with variations.

There are unexpected emphases on seemingly insignificant details, apparent avulsions of the sequence, and notable additions of elements that cause visual attention to shift from the “expected” progression. These visual cues lead the eye not only linearly across the folia (right to left, then down and right to left), but chiasmically as well—that is, diagonally across it, or across an open bifolium, or even across an entire sequence of illuminations—hinting that just as there are other possible formal configurations of the sequence of illustrations, there are other potential ways of understanding it.

Reading the iconography in this way calls into question the assumption that the artists simply started with Genesis and continued scene after scene until they concluded with the Exodus from Egypt. It seems, rather, that they carefully planned not only the choice of scenes, but also their disposition within each folio, and bifolium, and finally within the framework of the entire sequence of illuminations in terms of their visual relationship to one another. It is not unreasonable to conjecture that the authorship might have planned the disposition of the scenes in this way in order to highlight specific aggadic motifs and thus to emphasize particular ideas—ideological, theological, philosophical, historiosophical, or sociopolitical—related to its particular desired presentation of *sippur yezi’at Mizrayim*. In the absence of independent corroborative documentary evidence, the way in which the illuminations are disposed is the only clue to the process of planning on the part of the authorship, and to its intent in creating the manuscript. To sunder the individual iconographic elements from their context effectively closes the sole window onto the minds that made distinctive and particular iconographic choices in order to impart specific emphases to the finished manuscript. My responsibility as a scholar, then, instead of deconstructing the manuscript rather arbitrarily into seventy-six scenes based on preconceived arrangements within discrete boundaries, is to examine its iconography in a manner more integral to the construction of the entire sequence of illuminations and to the pervasive themes of the text that this sequence of illuminations introduces.

Viewed from the perspective of the patron planning them, or the illuminator who put them together, rather than from the vantage of the researcher intent on dissecting them, the series of illuminations that introduce the manuscript consist of seven bifolia, four illumination quadrants to a folio and eight to a bifolium. These are configured as follows: a first group of three bifolia depicting events from the book of Genesis (plates 27–32), a single central bifolium depicting scenes of transition between the events of Genesis and Exodus (plates 33–34), and a second group of three bifolia, this one depicting events from the book of Exodus and contemporary scenes (plates 35–40).

My contention is that the manuscript is a cohesive, intelligently structured, and well-planned entity, and its iconographic disposition is deliberately meaningful and cohesive. In some instances the relationships between the quadrants containing illumination appear simply to be aesthetically determined. But often an apparently aesthetic

decision on the part of the illuminators leads one's eye in such a way as to facilitate a nuanced or contextual reading. In my folio-by-folio reappraisal of the Golden Haggadah, I begin by describing the aesthetic relationships among the illuminations—the elements that draw the eye across the folio—and suggest some of the themes and connections that such readings inspire. For while the *pshat* (the simple contextual meaning of the illuminations) may be found in the linear reading, the *drash* (the exegetical strand) can be gleaned through other modes of reading. Thus the illuminations form something like the mathematical “magic square,” except that here the sum of the nonlinear readings is greater than that of a linear reading.

After reading the images in a variety of directions, I then resituate each in its “natural” sequence, noting the effect of its proximate or chiasmic relationship with other illuminations on the folio and within the bifolium, and commenting on its possible meaning. As I do so, I encounter instances in which the artists have arranged narrative scenes or elements within them in such a way as to run contrary to the “expected” sequence or disposition of illuminations. Rather than read these as errors I work from the assumption that the artists made choices about the placement and disposition of narrative and corroborative elements in the various scenes based on multiple criteria, both conceptual and aesthetic. I discuss these choices and evaluate their significance in terms of the larger context of the manuscript's disposition.

I then examine the position on the folio of particular illuminations as they relate to the others within their group (Genesis or Exodus). In some cases I set up comparisons of images that occupy the same relative position within each group. Finally, I attempt to understand the place of key illuminations in the entire sequence of seven bifolia.⁶

ADAM TO ABRAHAM: THE PREHISTORY OF REDEMPTION

Bifolium 1 (Folia 2v–3r; plates 27–28)

The first illumination of the Genesis group, and the first illustration of the biblical series, shows Adam naming the animals (fig. 41; plate 27). Some have proposed that the authorship wished to avoid depicting the scenes of the Creation so as to moot the problem of depicting God. But viewing the series as an integral whole, it makes sense to begin with a scene that defines human stewardship of the animal kingdom, given that the final illumination in the sequence depicts the Passover sacrifice (fig. 43; plate 40). The opening illustration thus establishes the entire cycle as building up to the moment of the Paschal sacrifice.⁷

Since the theme is stewardship of the animal kingdom as a justification for sacrifice, culminating with the Passover sacrifice, the relationship between the illumination of Adam's naming the animals and the one below it (plate 27, bottom right), Abel's sacrifice of the best of his flock, is fairly obvious as a continuation of that theme. Even more striking is the connection of Adam's naming of the animals at the upper right with

the illumination that appears diagonally at the lower left, in chiasmic opposition: that of Noah helping the last two animals from the ark. Read in the context of stewardship/sacrifice, it makes perfect sense that the animals Noah is assisting, placed in the center of the composition, are two sheep, an explicit typology of the daily Temple sacrifice. Adam's naming of the animals, in the scene in which the two sheep first appear, can be understood as initiating the first human relationship with animals, giving them identity. Noah, diagonally across the folio, reinstates the relationship in a postdiluvian context: animals can now be eaten (fig. 42) and so ultimately used for the Passover sacrifice—a sacrifice that will eventually be obligatory for the entire community of Israel (fig. 43; plate 40).

Thus, already on the manuscript's opening folio, there are several "invitations" to read the illuminations chiasmically and to understand the iconography within the context of the whole of the manuscript.

The figure of Adam sitting on an elevated hillock as he names the animals at the inception of the Genesis cycle finds its mirror image in the figure of Miriam sitting on an elevated hillock at the inception of the Exodus cycle, when Moses is drawn out of the water and thereby receives his name (figs. 44, 45; plates 27, 34). As both images are scenes of naming, it seems that the parallel iconography seeks to indicate the importance of naming for the inception of both narratives.

All nine animals that Adam names in the first illumination are iconographically significant. There are six kosher animals, including two birds, two sheep, a goat, and a red bull or cow, which together represent all the species of kosher beasts mentioned explicitly in the Bible as appropriate sacrificial gifts in the Tabernacle and Temple.⁸ There are also three nonkosher animals, which are important in terms of the continuing narrative: the primordial serpent (with legs), which will appear in the following illumination (plate 27, top left), and later in the manuscript in the form of Moses' serpent (plate 35, bottom right); a hare, which reappears hunted by Esau as an attribute of Jacob and Israel (plate 29, bottom right); and a donkey, which stands directly in front of Adam, facing left. The donkey is mirrored chiasmically by a nearly identical one in the illumination in the lower right of Noah leaving the ark. Donkeys figure again at other junctures in the narrative illuminations: one appears in the depictions of the *'Akedah* (plate 29, top left) and one—though interestingly transformed and "ennobled"—is ridden by Moses' wife Zipporah upon Moses' return to Egypt from Midian (plate 35, top left). Following the conventional mode of analysis, one might argue that the donkey appears so centrally and



FIGURE 41
Adam initiates the first human relationship with the animals.
Golden Haggadah, fol. 2v (detail)



FIGURE 42 LEFT
Noah reinstates the human relationship with animals in a postdiluvian context. Animals may now be eaten. Golden Haggadah, fol. 2v (detail)



FIGURE 43 RIGHT
The ultimate goal of the human relationship with animals: sacrifice, the Paschal sacrifice in particular. Golden Haggadah, fol. 15r (detail)

is so explicitly repeated on the first folio simply because it was an image available to the illuminators, who employed it heedlessly and indiscriminately. I, however, believe that the very prominence and repetition of the image might also be taken no less plausibly as an argument against the arbitrariness of the image, and for the possibility of intrinsic and contextual meaning.⁹

Proceeding conventionally rather than chiasmically now, to the left of the depiction of Adam naming the animals is the scene of the creation of Eve out of Adam's side. Here, unlike the Christian iconography wherein Eve turns away from Adam to face God, she is represented as turning toward Adam, the only depictable image of God, in a distinctly Jewish rendering. The eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is to the far left. Below and on the right are the sacrifice of Cain and Abel and the aftermath of the slaying of Abel by Cain. Finally, to the left, Noah leaves the ark.¹⁰

The narrative sequence of the biblical text is expressed via the conventional progression of the scenes, corresponding to *pshat*, contextual exegesis, in medieval biblical commentary. But the moral, theological, and political themes that were important to the authorship and that they wanted to stress are found in the chiasmic readings, corresponding to *drash*, homelitic exegesis. Throughout the manuscript, when the authorship wishes to engage in *drash*, the viewer is signaled by a variety of visual clues to read across the page. In the case of the present folio, double scenes are used in both the top left-hand frame (the creation of Eve and the temptation of Adam) and the bottom right-hand frame (the sacrifice of Cain and Abel and the slaying of Abel), forming a visual chiasm between these quadrants and indicating they should be read together. The connection



between them is further emphasized by the appearance of an angel emerging from a cloud which surmounts each of these double scenes. Angels, of course, represent divine intervention, but in this manuscript, their emergence from the clouds signals moments when the scriptural text interpolates the voice of God (plates 29, top and bottom left; 35, top right). Here, they connect Adam's abrogation of personal responsibility ("The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate," in Genesis 3:12) with Cain's ("Am I my brother's keeper?" in Genesis 4:9). These scenes of irresponsibility with regard to human relationships contrast with the stewardship that both Adam and Noah demonstrate toward God's creation in the opposite chiasmic relationship on the folio (plate 37, top and bottom right).

The left-hand folio of the bifolium begins with a double scene at the upper right: Noah tends his vines while his drunken nakedness is covered by his sons (fig. 48; plate 28). Once again the eye is drawn to the double scene at the lower left: Abraham entertains the angels while Sarah laughs in the tent. Following the scene of Noah's drunkenness in the conventional order is the scene of the confusion of language at the building of the Tower of Babel; and, next in sequence, at lower right, is the scene from rabbinic lore of Abraham being thrown into the fiery furnace by Nimrod (fig. 46).¹¹

The chiasmic parallels on this folio extend also to the opposite folio and coming folia. The obvious chiasms, reinforced by the monumental verticals of the architecture in both panels, are the two scenes describing the acts of Nimrod, in the upper left and lower right. The scene of Abraham cast into the fiery furnace was placed in the lower right-hand position so as to (1) introduce Abraham and (2) typologically foreshadow

FIGURE 44 LEFT
Adam on an elevated hillock as he names the animals at the beginning of the Genesis scenes. Golden Haggadah, fol. 2v (detail)

FIGURE 45 RIGHT
Miriam on an elevated hillock as Moses receives his name at the beginning of the Exodus scenes. Golden Haggadah, fol. 2v (detail)



FIGURE 46 LEFT
Nimrod, at right, points left toward Abraham being cast into the fiery furnace. Golden Haggadah, fol. 3r (detail)



FIGURE 47 RIGHT
Pharaoh, at left, points right, toward the Israelite firstborn males being cast into the Nile. Golden Haggadah, fol. 8v (detail)

both the casting of Joseph into the pit (plate 31, upper left) and the command by Pharaoh to cast all newborn males into the Nile (plate 33, lower left). This last parallel is made explicit in the design of the illuminations: Nimrod facing left, his commanding arm extended toward the left, directly mirrors Pharaoh facing right, his commanding arm extended toward the right (compare plate 28, lower right, and plate 33, lower left; figs. 46, 47). This is typological iconography at its most overt, invoking a major theme of the haggadah text, “more than one has risen up against us to destroy us.” It is also a striking visual confirmation of a rather circuitous assertion in rabbinic literature that connects Nimrod with Pharaoh.¹²

The composition of the scenes of Noah’s viticulture and drunkenness and the annunciation of Isaac’s birth and Sarah’s laughter—again, double scenes in both cases—is strongly horizontal, inviting the viewer to connect those scenes across the page. At the upper right, Noah’s self-absorbed drunkenness and self-exposure connects and contrasts with the illumination that appears diagonally at the lower left, of Abraham’s hospitality toward the angels. Noah’s act results in punishment: according to the rabbis, he suffers shame, whereas Abraham’s benevolence and Sarah’s modest concealment within the tent are connected with the fulfillment of the promise of future offspring.¹³

The two foci of the upper right-hand illustration are the basket of grapes and Noah’s genitals (fig. 48), whereas the foci of the lower left-hand illustration are the flask of water or wine held by Abraham and included in the pointing gesture of the angel, and Sarah’s womb, the focus of the gesture of the angel, of Abraham, and of Sarah herself (fig. 49).



In the upper right, the sons of Noah turn away from each other as they cover their father, like the cherubs surmounting the Ark of the Covenant who, legendarily, faced away from each other at times of divine displeasure. In the lower left, the two angels who are not involved in the action incline their heads toward each other like the cherubs on the Ark at a time of grace.¹⁴

The narcissism of Noah is thus contrasted with the altruism of Abraham: Noah's self-centeredness evokes divine disfavor and he is denied further offspring, whereas Abraham's generosity earns him divine favor, and his descendents multiply like the sand and the stars. The bifolium as a whole provides further parallels and rhythms. The very first illumination of the bifolium is a scene of naming (plate 27, upper right: Adam names the animals), and the last illustration in the bifolium shows a scene of naming (plate 28, lower left: Sarah laughing in the tent, the result of which is the naming of Isaac). Human choice (plate 27, upper left: the temptation of Adam and Eve) is contrasted with divine choosing (plate 28, lower left: the annunciation of Isaac's birth to Abraham and Sarah). Four angels lead the eye across the bifolium, forming a visual triangle that betokens divine intervention and sums up and indicates to the viewer the denouement of the narrative of the bifolium and the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

Across the bifolium one can note chiasmic parallels in position between Adam (plate 27, top right) and Nimrod (plate 28, bottom right), both commanding and demonstrating mastery. Yet in making them mirror images of each other, the authorship encourages the viewer to contrast Adam's divinely ordained mastery with Nimrod's attempted usurpation of the place of God. The opposite diagonal yields a connection

FIGURE 48 LEFT
Narcissism: Noah's drunkenness and exposure, his sons turning away from each other. Golden Haggadah, fol. 3r (detail)

FIGURE 50 RIGHT
Altruism: Abraham's hospitality, the angels turning toward each other. Golden Haggadah, fol. 3r (detail)

between the sacrifice of Cain and Abel, which leads to divine intervention and the first murder (plate 27, bottom right), with the building of the Tower of Babel by the “generation of division” (plate 28, top left).¹⁵ The implication here is that the Tower of Babel narrative should be viewed as the consequence and expansion of the intimate familial story of Cain and Abel—the archetype for violence between literal brother and brother. The story of the Tower is that of Cain and Abel “writ large” in a postdiluvian context, echoing and amplifying its themes of divine intervention and the turning of brother against brother in the more universal form of societal conflict and violence.

ANCESTRY AND COUNTERANCESTRY

Bifolium 2 (Folia 4v–5r; plates 29–30)

Folio 4v (plate 29) includes further examples of design employed in order to cue the viewer to thematic relationships highlighted across the page: the folio is bisected by a forty-five-degree angle formed by the lines of the ruins of the destroyed city of Sodom at the upper right that connect visually with Jacob’s ladder on the lower left. The viewer is led to contrast the destruction and fragmentation of Sodom with the eventual building of Jerusalem (the city of wholeness and peace) on the spot where Jacob slept. Sodom sinks into the earth, becoming the lowest place on the globe, while Jerusalem “stand[s] firm above the mountains and tower[s] above the hills,” and human connection to Divinity—as represented by Jacob’s ladder—is the remedy for turning away from God as the Sodomites did.¹⁶

Leading the eye crosswise on the other diagonal from upper left to lower right is the confluence between the remarkable position of the ram at the center of the *‘Akedah* scene, which is oddly not only “caught in the thicket” but literally suspended from it, and the equally strange hare hanging from Esau’s club below. These two “hanging” elements are clearly in visual relationship, but the intentionality of this configuration can be felt more strongly when their conceptual relationship is understood. The ram is symbolic of narrow escape. It is the *t’murah* (the exchange) for Isaac, which protects him from God’s demand of his father. As I have indicated elsewhere, Esau’s hare is a symbol of Jacob and Israel. Its entrapment by Esau is a hint of the subjugation of the Jews to the nations, though it is never actually killed. In this sense it is a symbol of the trial of exile, where the “head has become the tail” and Jews are pursued like hares but ultimately manage to escape their fate. It thus forms a parallel with the ram associated with the preservation of Isaac. Just as Isaac was saved from the fate to which God had demanded his father subject him, Jacob is saved from the wrath of a brother from whom he stole the birthright that was rightfully his. In both cases, God’s stern commandment is effectively abrogated by the merciful manifestation of God’s will and God’s desire to intervene in history on behalf of his chosen ones. Thus God’s demand to sacrifice that which is most favored yields to

God's desire to continue the patriarchal line through a particular offspring, and God's desire to insure the inheritance of the physically first-born gives way to God's wish to insure the inheritance of the one who is spiritually favored.¹⁷

The viewer might understand these illuminations as an iconographic confirmation of two principles. The first is that destinies that appear initially to be manifestations of divine justice can be commuted by divine mercy. Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son, Jacob was destined to be the prey of Esau, and the servitude in Egypt was decreed to last four hundred years. But these decrees were tempered: Isaac was saved, Jacob was preserved alive, and the actual length of the oppressive servitude of the Israelites was only eighty-six years.¹⁸ Second, the illuminations illustrate the precept of *ma'aseh 'avot siman le-banim*: the idea that the experiences of one's ancestors typologically foreshadow and are recapitulated in one's own experiences.¹⁹ Taken together, these two principles confirm the idea that God seeks the preservation, not the destruction, of the viewers of this manuscript, who may have themselves—in spite of their wealth and power—felt (at least theologically) “trapped” in exile, and they testify that God will ultimately redeem them from the present exile, just as their ancestors were redeemed. In a very real way these images confirm the foundational principle of the entirety of the haggadah—the interweaving of the Exodus experience with contemporary reality—as exemplified in the blessing over the second cup of wine, the blessing of redemption, which thanks God for having “redeemed *us*, and redeemed *our ancestors* from Egypt, and brought us on this night to eat *mazah* and *maror*.”²⁰

Narkiss takes issue with the avulsion of components of the double scene depicted at lower right (plate 29): Isaac's blessing of Jacob (left), and Esau hastening in from the field (right). According to the literal biblical narrative, he asserts, “the scenes ... in this compartment should be read from left to right.”²¹ But showing Esau on the right side of the illumination (on Isaac and Jacob's left, were the scene played out before us) makes perfect sense in terms of the overall conception of the folio. This folio introduces the various shoots of the Israelite family tree that branched off from the main stock: the brothers and half-brothers and cousins of the patriarchs. These, to the rabbinic mind, were the ancestors of the cultures with which the biblical Israelites would come into conflict. Medieval Spanish Jews identified these cultures with the various “nations of the world” within the scope of their contemporary experience. They understood the conflicts of the biblical Israelites with the nations which sprang from their own family tree as the dominant paradigm for their own relationship with other religious cultures.

On the upper right Lot exits toward the right with his daughters, as they flee to the cave where their incestuous relations will give rise to the nations of Moab and Ammon, inveterate enemies of the biblical Israelites.²² On the upper left, Ishmael—the precursor

of the Arab peoples in medieval Jewish lore—appears on the right as one of the “servants” with the donkey. Below right, Esau, Jacob’s physical foe and the patriarch of Edom, enters from the right. Finally, on the lower left, Jacob slumbers at the foot of the ladder while, in heaven, his mirror image appears carved as the “man”: the angel who bears the divine chariot/throne.²³ Esau appears again, this time in the guise of the “angel of Esau,” entering from the right, in exactly the same position in this illumination as Esau the hunter in the previous one.²⁴ The last of the four angels who appear in Jacob’s dream, representing the kingdoms to which Jacob’s descendants will be subject, is “Esau’s angel,” representing Edom—Rome, or Christianity, according to rabbinic tradition. With a harsh face and outstretched, grasping arms he threatens to displace the sleeping Jacob. Inasmuch as subjugation to Edom or Christianity constituted the “present exile” for the original creators of the manuscript, Esau is depicted twice on this folio: once in the scene of the deception over the birthright, where he appears as Jacob’s physical pursuer, and a second time in the scene of Jacob’s dream, where he is manifest as Jacob’s spiritual enemy.²⁵

As all the other ambivalent figures—Lot’s daughters, Ishmael, and Esau’s angel—are shown on the right side of the illuminations in which they appear, it is appropriate that Esau the hunter enters from that direction as well. Thus, the apparent avulsion of the scenes of Jacob’s blessing and Esau’s return from the hunt seems, in actuality, to be a deliberate creative misreading of the biblical sequence. It demonstrates that the planners of the manuscript prioritized the exposition of themes and concepts in the narrative over a slavish conformity to the “correct” flow of the iconography according to the direction of the Hebrew language. The adage “there is no ‘early’ and ‘late’ in the Torah” (BT *Pesahim* 6b), so famously applied by exegetes like Rashi to apparent (but not, in his opinion, actual) inconsistencies in the sequence of scriptural narrative, is equally apt when applied to the Golden Haggadah’s iconographic treatment of the Torah’s narrative.²⁶

Once again it is a remarkable group of angels, this time not four but nine, that draws the eye across the second bifolium—across and downward on the right-hand folio and diagonally across the left-hand folio. On the left-hand folio, the connections are obvious between the extremely similar scenes at top right (Jacob wrestling the angel) and bottom left (Joseph being guided by an angel). Each depicts a human figure interacting with angels at right, separated from a group of six figures at left. Again, the compositional similarity of these scenes leads one to consider the principle being taught by their juxtaposition, in this case, that of *ma’aseh’avot siman le-banim*—the idea that the experience of one’s ancestors foreshadows one’s own, that we are all products of our past. The key to this lies in the illumination at lower left. The depiction there of the angel Gabriel instead of the “man” specified in the text of Genesis 37:15 is more than a mere “midrashic detail.” The angel is shown in order to emphasize the continuity of the experience of Joseph

with that of his ancestors, each of whom encountered angels. It was really not necessary to depict an angel in this last quadrant, but the midrashic element was deployed here to tie the patriarchal sequence together visually in a way that elucidates the principle of *ma'aseh 'avot siman le-banim*.²⁷

The illuminations of this central bifolium in the group of Genesis illustrations relates to the other images that come before and after them. Thus, the destruction of Sodom (plate 29, top right), where God decrees, “Their sin so grave [that] I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note” (Genesis 18:20–21), is painted back-to-back with the destruction of the Tower of Babel on the preceding folio, the episode in which God says, “If...this is how they have begun to act...let us, then, go down and confound their speech” (Genesis 11:6–7, plate 28, top left). The nation that is promised to Abraham at the annunciation of Isaac’s birth (plate 28, bottom left) reaches the threshold of its destiny in the illumination painted back-to-back with it (plate 29, bottom right), which depicts the blessing of Jacob by Isaac. Joseph’s dreams (plate 30, top left) appear in the upper left with Joseph facing right, whereas if one turns the folio one finds Pharaoh’s dream as a mirror image of Joseph’s, in the upper right-hand quadrant, with Pharaoh facing left (plate 32). Thus, the physical act of reading—the literal turning of pages—is here inexorably linked to epiphanies of meaning. One needs to experience the book as a material artifact with a particular structure in order to fully apprehend the intellectual nuances of its composition.²⁸

MEASURE FOR MEASURE: THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE

Bifolium 3 (Folia 6v–7r; plates 31–32)

Folio 6v (plate 31) is dense with visual and conceptual connections. As the events of patriarchal narrative come to a head in this penultimate folio in the Genesis group with the sale of Joseph by his brothers, one can follow the odyssey of various garments. Each of the scenes relates in some way to clothing, which one can see clustered around the center of the four illuminations. In the bottom left of the upper right-hand quadrant, Joseph’s garment is bloodied by his brothers. Directly next to this, in the far right of the next quadrant, one of Joseph’s brothers receives money for the Ishmaelites, wrapping it in his inner garment. Directly below, Jacob tears his inner garment as Joseph’s bloody garment is brought before him; completing the inner circle, Potiphar’s wife grabs Joseph’s garment as he flees from her.²⁹

The most telling elements of the iconography are those in the upper quadrants (plate 31, top). According to Kogman-Appel, the entire scene at top right, where Joseph is thrown into the pit and his garment bloodied, is reversed from its putative model, causing an avulsion of the narrative sequence of Genesis 37. Kogman-Appel understands this

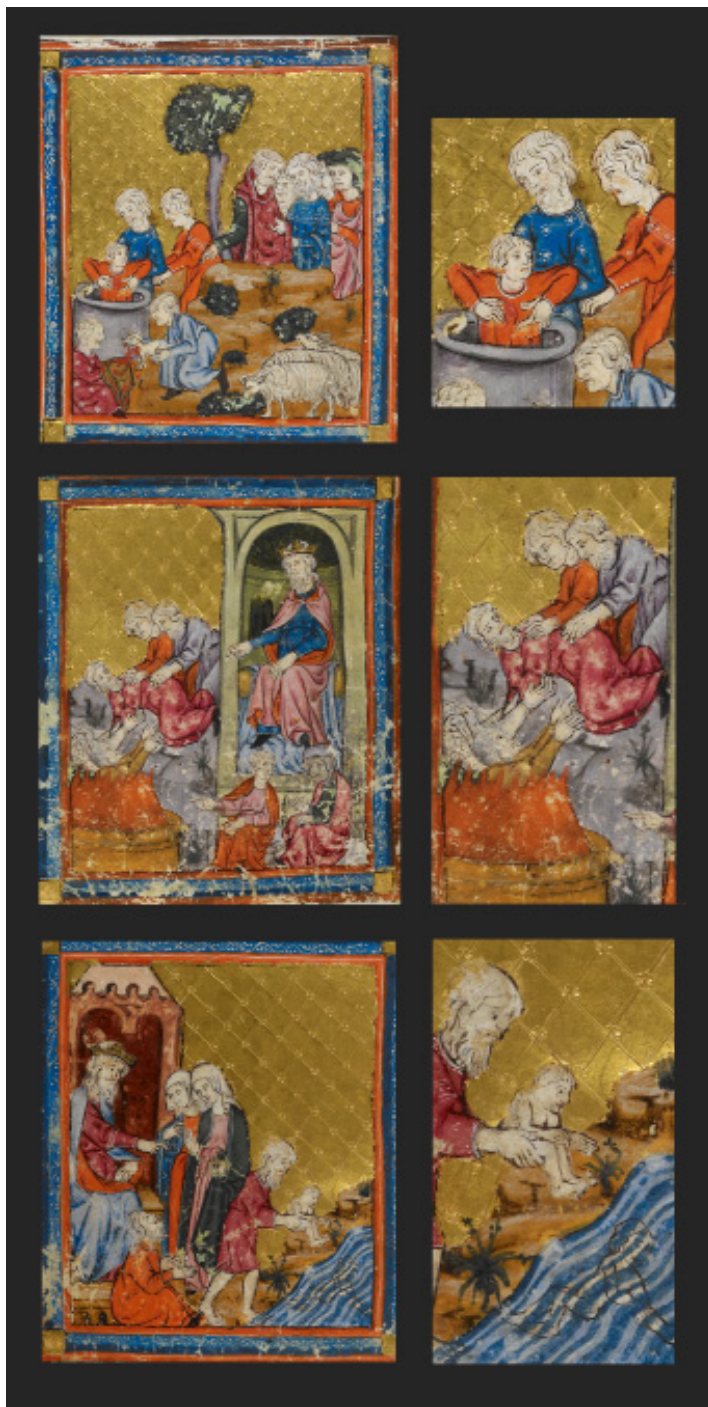


FIGURE 50
 Top, Golden Haggadah: fol. 3r (detail), Nimrod casts Abraham into the fiery furnace (with further detail); center, fol. 6v (detail), the brothers cast Joseph into the pit (with further detail); bottom, fol. 8v (detail), Pharaoh casts the newborn Israelite males into the Nile (with further detail)

to be the result of a technical issue in the chain of the transmission of the motif. Yet, the effect of the reversal of the model here is to bring the scene of Joseph's coat being bloodied into the center of the page rather than relegating it to the far left of the following scene.³⁰

The inclusion of the detail of Joseph's brother lifting his cloak to receive the "tainted" money for having sold his brother into slavery seems narratologically unnecessary. Yet it, too, ensures that references to clothing appear in all the quadrants of the folio, tying the folio together thematically.³¹ The avulsion of the iconography of the bloodying of Joseph's coat, and the inclusion of the detail of the brother lifting his garment, are devices consciously employed by the authorship to visually complete the circle of connections.

The scene of Joseph's betrayal is linked with two other images of the attempted destruction of infants and young people, paralleling in its structure Nimrod's casting of Abraham into the fiery furnace on the one hand and Pharaoh's casting of the newborns into the Nile on the other (fig. 50). In fact, insofar as the geometry of the manuscript permits, this scene is equidistant from the images of both kings, appearing as the ninth event after the Abraham-Nimrod incident, and as the tenth event before the representation of Pharaoh's crime. Read together, the image of Joseph betrayed by his brothers forms the apex of a triangle with the narratives of the deeds of the evil kings as its sides (fig. 51). Joseph's betrayal is not explicitly connected in rabbinic literature with the deeds of Nimrod and Pharaoh. The

visual connection made here represents an independent exegetical move on the part of the authorship of the Golden Haggadah. Through a rather thinly veiled judgment of the deed of the brothers, it renders an implicit critique of the attitude that Jewish history is nothing but an endless stream of persecutions of innocent Israel by the bloodthirsty gentiles. Yes, it is acknowledged, these gentile kings might behave villainously in their persecution of Jews. But groundless hatred between brother and brother is on a par with such terrible deeds, and sometimes *sin'at hinam* (causeless enmity among Jews) can precipitate treachery as destructive as persecution by inveterate enemies.³²



FIGURE 51

Golden Haggadah, fols. 3r, bottom right, through 6v, bottom left, demonstrating the equidistant placement of the scene of the brothers casting Joseph into the pit between that of Nimrod casting Abraham into the fiery furnace and that of Pharaoh casting the newborn Israelite males into the Nile

Chiasmic parallels directly across the third bifolium include the casting of Joseph into the pit (*bor*) (plate 31, top right), with the culmination of that episode in his emergence from prison (*beit ha-bor*) (plate 32, top left). There is also found the depiction of the grief of Jacob for his lost son (plate 31, bottom right), and the resolution of that episode in the reunification and reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers (plate 32, bottom left). The scene of the dreams of the butler and baker (plate 31, bottom left) appears on a diagonal with the dream of Pharaoh (plate 32, top right). Narratologically, these events represent the turning point of the scriptural account, and, accordingly, serve as the “visual pivot” of the folio. On the inner diagonal, the handing over of Joseph to the Ishmaelites (plate 31, top left) iconographically mirrors Joseph’s consignment of his brother Simeon to prison (plate 32, bottom right), as the casting of young Joseph into the pit by his older, bearded brother (plate 31, top right) mirrors the older, bearded Joseph raising the young Benjamin to his bosom and embracing him (plate 32, lower left).

This last scene is powerful in context. On folio 4v each father among the Patriarchs is depicted as physically relating to his favored son in some way. Abraham grasps Isaac at the *’Akedah* (plate 29, top left). Below and to the right, in chiasmic opposition, Isaac in turn grasps Jacob.³³ Joseph, by way of contrast with his father and grandfather, is never shown being held by his own father in these illuminations. In fact, the only encounter between Joseph and Jacob in the entire cycle is in folio 5r, where Joseph is admonished by an angry Jacob (plate 30, lower right). He is, however, shown being held and grasped in violent and coercive ways on folio 6v by the brothers, the Ishmaelites, and Potiphar’s wife (plate 31, top and lower left). This makes the two scenes at the bottom of folio 7r especially poignant. At bottom right Joseph has Simeon violently seized and thrown into prison, doing—in effect—unto his brother as his brothers had done unto him. But at bottom left he does for Benjamin what no one has ever done for him: he reaches out to him and holds him lovingly in one of the most tender scenes in the entire series, and one that emphasizes in an unparalleled way the reconciliation that takes place at the end of the narrative. It is notable that the Exodus series also closes with an image of familial love demonstrated through physical closeness—that of a father holding his son on his shoulder in the scene of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds (plate 39, bottom left).

The idea of the continuing covenant is the central, underlying message of the illustrations of the narratives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: it is palpably manifested in iconography that demonstrates that the “deeds of the ancestors are revisited upon their children.” The Joseph story is at its most narratologically powerful in its exposition of another principle that is also cardinal in the haggadah: *middah ke-neged middah* (literally, measure for measure), which asserts that reward and punishment are meted out in accordance to deed, and reveals the karmic effects of human action in a world imprinted with a divine blueprint for human destiny. Small wonder, then, that within the series of

illuminations the iconography of the Joseph narrative occupies the identical relative position within the Genesis group that is occupied by iconography of the Ten Plagues in the Exodus group, right down to the placement of the first incident of each narrative series in the lower left-hand quadrant preceding the bifolium containing the remainder of the narrative. The Ten Plagues, of course, is the other explicit example of the principle of measure-for-measure reward and punishment in this series of illuminations. The parallel placement serves to stress that the element of divine justice in reward and punishment in proportion to deed is as applicable in the context of the internal relationship of Jew to Jew as it is in the relationship of Israel with her oppressors among the nations.

TRANSITION: THE DEATH OF THE OLD AND THE BIRTH OF SALVATION

Bifolium 4 (central bifolium, Folia 8v–9r; plates 33–34)

The central bifolium provides a transition between the Genesis and Exodus groups. In its first quadrant, Jacob has made his way to Egypt, and, thematically, the upper scenes on this folio are hopeful scenes of connectedness and blessing: Jacob blesses Pharaoh and Jacob blesses Ephraim and Menasseh (plate 33, top). But events quickly take a turn for the worse in the lower register. These are scenes of loss: the mourning for Jacob and the drowning of the infants in the Nile. Hope resurfaces at the top of the left-hand folio with the finding of Moses and his introduction into the house of Pharaoh (plate 34, top). Then, again at the bottom of the folio, conflict and strife once more prevail: an Egyptian beating an Israelite, Moses' killing of that Egyptian and his subsequent confrontation with the shepherds after he has fled to Midian. By the time the images on the bifolium have been fully absorbed, its viewers have followed the transition from the good life in Egypt to the end of the old generation and the rise to power of a Pharaoh "who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8), to the birth of a savior and the beginnings of his development, and are prepared for the introduction of the events of Exodus proper (plate 35).

I wish to linger on the disposition of the scenes in this central bifolium, because it contains juxtapositions and displacements that yield insight into the exegetical method of the authorship. In this bifolium, there was, it seems, a desire, paralleling that expressed in the midrash, to contrast the role of water in *poranut* (tragedy) with its role in *yeshu'a* (salvation). Across the bifolium the visual elements form two triangles, one set on its apex, another set on its base, that are bounded and defined by scenes through which water flows. First, a river full of fish flows by Joseph's brothers as Jacob blesses Pharaoh (plate 33, top right). This draws the eye toward the lower left, where there is a depiction of the Nile, replete with a drowned male infant, in continuation of the same forty-five-degree angle begun by the river in the upper right. From there the eye is drawn up again to the image of the finding of Moses by the maids of Pharaoh's daughter, and then down again to the illustration of Moses saving the daughters of Jethro from the shepherds

who have gathered around a stream of flowing water (plate 34, top right and bottom left), contrary to Exodus 2:15, which describes the incident as occurring near a well.³⁴

There is an unambiguous connection between Pharaoh's command that male newborns be drowned and Moses' salvation through the very element intended for his destruction under that decree. Like the dreams interpreted by Joseph, these events represent the narratological turning point of the scriptural account, and they appear at what I have called the visual pivot of the bifolium. But on these pages the classical textual midrash is supplemented by iconographic exegesis in the form of the inclusion of two other narratives connecting water with salvation. The most obvious is Moses' saving the daughters of Jethro at the stream. Simultaneously subtler and more telling, however, is the placement of the river in the opening image of the bifolium (plate 33, top right). According to rabbinic tradition, the blessing that Jacob gave to Joseph was specifically connected with the Nile River and its fertility. Quoting *Tanhum'a Nass'o* 26, Rashi on Genesis 47:10 asserts that Jacob blessed Pharaoh "that the Nile should rise at his approach, because Egypt does not drink rainwater, but the Nile rises and waters it, and after Jacob's blessing, Pharaoh would come to the Nile, and it would rise to greet him and water the land." The disposition of the image of the Nile on the page forms a continuous forty-five-degree angle, "flowing" from top right to bottom left, drawing the eye down across the page from the depiction of Jacob blessing Pharaoh on the banks of the fish-filled river, to the scene of Pharaoh's order to drown the newborns, in which the same river is now filled with infant corpses. This enables the viewer to contrast the image of the Nile's fertility and benefit for the Egyptians with the tragic scene of infanticide.

The authorship was thus able to draw a clear distinction between the blessing of fruitfulness and the harsh reality of infanticide. In this location it echoes in position the image in the upper right of the left-hand folio, where Moses, the savior, is drawn from the water. A visual triangle is thus formed by the illustrations of the blessing of fruitfulness, Pharaoh's attempt to thwart it, and the saving of Moses, which in turn undermines Pharaoh's decree. The bountiful river, which might be taken for mere corroborative detail, turns out to be a key element in a sparkling example of the extremely subtle and conscientious planning of the sequence of illuminations: the fish-filled river of blessing, as opposed to the corpse-filled river of death, had a further association for Jews. In Genesis 48:15–16 Jacob blesses his grandsons Ephraim and Menasseh to "multiply like fish"—a prophetic typological prophylactic against the Egyptians' attempted destruction by water of the Israelites. This association of water with both fertility and death would not have gone unnoticed by the audience of the Golden Haggadah because of the midrashic commonplace that asserts that salvation and destruction would come to the Jewish people through water.³⁵

Further chiasmic parallels are formed in the bifolium between Jacob's deathbed (plate 33, top left) and his coffin (bottom right), which draw the eye diagonally across the folio. The visual association between the coffin and the coffinlike ark in which Moses is discovered (plate 34, top right) makes the connection between the end of an old era and the beginning of a new one. In the upper left-hand panel of each folio there is a scene of children brought before a leader: Jacob with Ephraim and Menasseh, and Pharaoh with the infant Moses. Both scenes represent challenges to authority: in the first case, the younger child receives the blessing that should have gone to the elder; in the second, a child of the Hebrews is raised as a prince in the very bosom of the enslaving enemy. And the lower right-hand panel of each folio depicts a death: in the first case the natural death of Jacob, and in the other the execution of the Egyptian by Moses. The latter appears in the same position on the folio as the murder of Abel (plate 27) and is similarly configured as a double scene of a killing and its consequences (even depicting the identical murder weapon—an axe). Finally, Moses' salvation at the hands of women (plate 34, top right) is paralleled chiasmically by his saving of the daughters of Jethro from the shepherds (bottom left), and the subversion of his identity through his infiltration of Pharaoh's court as an infant (top left) parallels his reclamation of this identity and his subversion of Pharaoh's rule by killing the Egyptian (bottom right). This bifolium thus continues the emphasis on the axioms of *middah ke-neged middah* and *ma'aseh 'avot siman le-banim*.

ENCOUNTER AND DEHUMANIZATION

Bifolium 5 (Folia 10v–11r; plates 35–36)

Folio 10v (plate 35) introduces the Exodus group with the story of Moses' mission. The four illuminations depict in shorthand first Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush (top right); followed by his encounter with his identity as an Israelite on the road back to Egypt from Midian (top left); then his encounter with his people, as he tells the elders of the Children of Israel his plan and demonstrates God's miracles (bottom right); and finally, his first encounter with Pharaoh (bottom left). Folio 10v (plate 35), the first right-hand folio in the Exodus sequence proper, parallels the last right-hand folio in the Genesis sequence (plate 31). While the final Genesis folio highlighted five garments in a tight inner circle formed by the four illuminations, in this folio from Exodus, five rods, sticks, or staves appear in a looser circle on the periphery of the four illuminations. In order, they are Moses' shepherd's staff, the spear he holds as he returns to Egypt from Midian, the staff-turned-serpent before the elders, and the more refined rod that Moses carries during his first encounter with Pharaoh (the plainness of which stands in contrast to Pharaoh's fleur-de-lys-topped scepter in the same illumination). Chiasm highlights the contrast between Moses' humility in his encounter with God, on which occasion

he covers his face, and his commanding presence when he stands before Pharaoh, the earthly monarch, in which instance his posture is erect and he confidently clutches his staff and folds his garment under his arm. Other elements of note are the dog, which appears in both upper illuminations, and the rather horselike donkey, which has previously appeared, in a shaggier and less distinguished guise, in the scene of the *'Akedah*. There it appears in the same position as it does in this illumination—in the upper left-hand quadrant of a right-hand folio.

On folio 11r (plate 36) five staves appear again, these being the staves in the hand of the taskmaster and laborer respectively at upper right; the one in the hand of a second taskmaster at upper left; the staff-turned-serpent, this time held by Aaron, as it swallows the serpents of Pharaoh's magicians (in the identical lower right position on the folio as the illumination on the facing folio of Moses' demonstrating the same miracle before the elders); and the staff that Aaron uses to inaugurate the plague of blood. Other prominent contrasts and parallels here include the appearance of the building of the cities of Pithom and Raamses (top left) in the same position as the Tower of Babel in the Genesis group: that is, the upper left-hand illustration on the second folio of the group (plate 28), and the touching parallelism between the midrashic incident of the woman with the baby who is about to be cast into a brick mold in an incident I will discuss below (plate 36, top right), and Zipporah's babies, whose lives are about to be spared in the incident of Exodus 4:24–26 (plate 35, upper left).

The theme of measure-for-measure reward and punishment is repeated and amplified in this folio, as is appropriate for the folio that introduces the plagues. Just as taskmasters command the Children of Israel to labor at digging (plate 36, top right), diagonally across the folio (lower left) the Egyptians are ultimately forced to dig for water when their rivers turn to blood. Just as an infant is swallowed up by the mortar (top right), so, directly underneath, are the serpents of Pharaoh's magicians swallowed by Aaron's serpent. And just as the Israelite slaves are bent as they draw the ropes and pulleys to raise bricks on a building facade (top left), so, directly below, are the Egyptians bent as they are forced to hoe the earth seeking water but finding only blood (bottom left).

GESTURE AND RESPONSE IN ILLUMINATING THE PLAGUES

Folio 11r, lower left (plate 36), Bifolium 12v–13r (plates 37–38), Folio 14v upper right (plate 39)

The plague narratives are less pregnant with chiasmic parallels, and more susceptible to readings that expose the sensitive agenda of representing suffering in a highly rarefied and refined yet politically charged context. Moreover, they present some obvious iconographic challenges for the artists and designers. Does *'arov* mean a swarm of insects or a horde of beasts? How does one represent the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, and how does

one make a distinction between instances in which he hardens his own heart and those in which God intervenes to do it for him? How best to indicate that the cattle plague is initiated by God with no human agency? How to depict total darkness yet still be able to show the Egyptians groping about in it? Can one (or should one) illustrate the *mashhit*, the angel of destruction that Exodus 12:23 asserts was the cause of the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn but whose agency in the narrative the haggadah text denies? Some of these issues are grappled with ingeniously and effectively by the Golden Haggadah authorship; others were explored by the creators of BL Or. 1404 and the Rylands Haggadah.

Throughout the Golden Haggadah a highly courtly ethos prevails: static, iconic, and dignified. But supplementation of the narrative with iconographic details drawn from midrash serves to heighten the drama to the extent that this ethos allows. Below the surface gravitas lurks both a complexity and a playfulness that makes the illustrations more interesting the more carefully they are examined. This feature is vital to holding the attention of participants at the seder—and to understanding these illustrations as commentary in and of themselves.

Thus, the treatment of the plague of frogs (plate 37, top right) appears straightforward at first. Aaron thrusts his staff into the Nile and frogs emerge to fill the architectural space at left, which contains Pharaoh on his throne and another Egyptian peering through a window. Sixteen frogs swarm over vessels, into food, and over the windowsill. The text caption reads *va-ta'al ha-zefardey'a* (“and the frog emerged”). The apparent singular case here is not a scribal error but a direct transcription of Exodus 8:6. In biblical and modern Hebrew the word “frog” (*zefardey'a*) usually refers to a single frog, the plural being *z'fardey'im*. But in biblical Hebrew the word *zefardey'a* can more unusually appear as a collective noun for a swarm of frogs, much as the English word “fish” can stand for a single animal or a school. The biblical text reads “the frog came up,” using the singular *zefardey'a* to indicate a swarm. And rabbinic midrash, in order to reconcile the grammar and amplify the miracle, reports that a gigantic monstrous frog emerged from the Nile, waddled up to Pharaoh, and issued the whole plague of frogs. And thus—according to midrash—is the scene depicted in the Golden Haggadah. Aaron's staff collides with a large frog that emerges from the Nile and disgorges a horde of smaller frogs. Granted, the frog is not monstrous. In keeping with the general dignity of the courtly aesthetic it is simply slightly larger than the other frogs. But it is indisputably the frog of the midrash; the other frogs unquestionably emerge from it.³⁶

There is a further level of midrashic complexity in the positioning of this illumination. This is the only time among the illuminations of the book of Exodus that Pharaoh appears in the top right position on a left-hand folio. Pharaoh similarly appears only once in that position on a left-hand folio in the course of the illustrations of the Book of Genesis. There, on folio 8v (plate 33), the “good” Pharaoh is depicted seated next to

Jacob and Joseph, as Jacob blesses Pharaoh and the Nile with abundance, and, indeed, here the river is full of fish. In this context, as I have noted, the illumination is situated next to the illumination of the benediction of Menasseh and Ephraim (who are blessed to “multiply like fish” in Genesis 48:16) and chiasmically opposed to the depiction of the slaying of the Israelite firstborn by the new Pharaoh “who knew not Joseph.” In the latter illumination, the Nile again appears, but here, instead of teeming with fish, it is filled with infant corpses.

In the present illumination the river also appears, but again, instead of the blessed Nile swarming with a healthy abundance of fish, it is the cursed Nile that is depicted, swarming with a superabundance of frogs. A moral equation is being made here. Had the new Pharaoh been a good king he would have merited experiencing a land of healthy fertility via Jacob’s blessing on the Nile. But because he was an evil king he merited only a curse. The parallel positioning of the illuminations helps to make the theological point that nature conforms to divine will, bringing blessing upon the good but a curse to the wicked.

Finally, the authorship went a step beyond the midrash in making things unpleasant for the Egyptians, inventing a rather scatological detail that is at once charming and virtuosic, betokening a close involvement with both the narrative and the illumination as commentary on that narrative. To give credit where credit is due: I once was presenting this image to a large audience, pointing out how the big frog was disgorging all the smaller frogs, when my then-eight-year-old daughter Shevi raised her hand and announced to the august assembly that she had noticed that Aaron was striking the big frog’s head and that the frog was, in fact, excreting the smaller frogs from its posterior. This was an observation (offered in language slightly more blunt and considerably more embarrassing) that it took an eight-year-old to make, but that is, in fact, correct, and it demonstrates the playfulness of the authorship in highlighting the repulsiveness of the plague in spite of the external air of courtly dignity in the rendering of the illumination.

Once one notices this detail it is unavoidably there. But this manner of expressing the repulsiveness of the plague is contingent on very small gestures—the size and situation of the large frog relative to the other frogs, and the position of the stick—in the midst of a larger choreography of subtle and restrained gesture, movement, and setting. In the folia depicting the plagues there are other gestures, movements, and positionings that highlight aspects of the ideological, theological, philosophical, historiosophical, political, or social worldview of the authorship—particularly its observations about Jews and gentiles and the social norms of courtly society.

The plague scenes depict Jews (Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites) in conjunction and conversation with—as well as in contradistinction to and in debate with—non-Jews

(Pharaoh, his magicians, advisers, and other Egyptians). The representation of the interactions occasioned by the plague narratives presented an opportunity for the authorship to play out aspects of the drama of relationship between themselves and their Christian neighbors, as they experienced (or projected) that drama.

Consequently, I am bound to consider closely whether the Israelites and the Egyptians appear, dress, and behave alike or differently in the illuminations. Do they interact civilly, or with obvious rancor? Are Egyptians and Israelites depicted with equal dignity, or are the “evil” Egyptians given cruel, mocking, animalistic physiognomies comparable to those of the “enemies of God” in Christian visual culture—the Jews depicted as torturing and crucifying Jesus?³⁷ I must scrutinize any juncture at which the iconography amplifies or softens the biblical account. To what extent are the Egyptians depicted as suffering as a result of the plagues, and is the salvation of the Israelites from the same plagues emphasized or downplayed? Does the overall sensibility of the illuminations in the sequence move toward vengefulness and triumphalism, or does it assert a certain quietistic detachment from issues of personal or national vengeance? Finally, the iconography of the plagues (and in particular, of the suffering of the Egyptians) raises questions of the degree of empathy the authorship felt that Jews could or should have for the suffering of non-Jews. Are the depictions of Egyptian suffering portrayed as slapstick, conducive to *schadenfreude*, or are they nuanced, evoking sympathy in the viewer? Taken together, such observations may provide a glimpse of, if not the “objective reality,” at least the subjective attitude of the authorship toward the lived, contemporary relationship between Jews and gentiles at the time and place of the manuscript’s composition.

In the Golden Haggadah both Israelites and Egyptians appear as aristocrats, differing only slightly in dress and not at all in terms of physiognomy. At no juncture is the moral evil of the Egyptians as represented in the biblical narrative indicated by depicting them as ugly or bestial. It is rather in the language of their gestures that various harsh attitudes can be ascertained: dismissal, disdain, disgust, incredulousness, arrogance, autocracy, and command. Anger and rancor are never depicted, and Israelites and Egyptians at court interact as equals. Even the slaving Israelites are illustrated with consummate elegance, their humbled status indicated only by their relatively simple (but remarkably unragged) dress. Throughout the manuscript, indications of distress, pain, and suffering are minimized or treated so genteelly that very little emotion is in evidence. The salvation of the Israelites is depicted without any indication of vengefulness or triumphalism, and the suffering of the Egyptians is downplayed, never descending to the level of slapstick. In fact, a particular type of suffering—sadness over the loss of children—is depicted with equal sensitivity and sympathy whether it occurs in the Israelite or the Egyptian context.³⁸

Given this relatively static, polished, courtly iconographic presentation—long on dignity and short on mockery—how did the authorship of the Golden Haggadah convey



FIGURE 52
Pharaoh calmly observes Moses' discussion with his counselor. Golden Haggadah, fol. 10v (detail)

the effects of the plagues on the Egyptians? Even an authorship so apparently quietistic and concerned with preserving the status quo that it so strongly muted the suffering of the Egyptians and limited the triumphalism of the Israelites could not ignore the fact that both in the biblical narrative and in the text of the haggadah the plagues have devastating effects on Egypt. The authorship mediated between the demands of the text and its own general reserve by telegraphing the results of the plagues with subtle indications of the decline of Pharaoh's personal ease, equilibrium, and *majestas*.

Though attacked, at one point, by a squirrel, the Pharaoh of the Golden Haggadah is never mocked in the way he is in the Rylands Haggadah, folio 17r (plate 53), where he is reduced to a shell of a man with hollow eyes, steadying his crown after it has been nearly

knocked off his head by a hailstone. In the Golden Haggadah, Pharaoh's distress during the plagues is made obvious in a more subtle manner, in small gestures of disconcertion which, for the original audience, would have spoken volumes. Pharaoh, of course, stands for all of Egypt in this luxurious manuscript. He and his courtiers are the Egyptians par excellence, the figures most associated by the aristocratic authorship of the Golden Haggadah with their own contemporary overlords. Being *grandees* themselves, they understood that specifically because it takes so much to cause cracks in a mighty monarch's armor, even his most subtle reaction to an assault can be viewed and understood by those in the know as a sign of his decline. In the slightly earlier psalter made for King Louis IX of France, for instance, Pharaoh is not even shown in the depictions of nine of the ten plagues, presumably because it would have been deemed improper to depict a monarch in an undignified position in a manuscript made for a monarch.³⁹

Accordingly, in the depiction of Moses and Aaron's first appearance before Pharaoh (fig. 52; plate 35, bottom left), Pharaoh is shown in an attitude of regal, relaxed insouciance. He holds his scepter lightly between the fingers of one hand as his other hand grasps his ankle. Although the text (Exodus 5:2) puts the words "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, nor will I let Israel go," in his mouth, in the illumination he is close-lipped, and the authorship gives the discursive gesture to the courtier at his right. This is one of the instances in which the authorship deliberately departs from the text in order to amplify its meaning against the backdrop of lived experience. While the text highlights Pharaoh's arrogance in asking the question, in the illumination his arrogance is compounded. He calmly surveys the scene, his body language clearly manifesting the attitude expressed in Exodus 5:2, but he does not even deign to open his mouth to speak to Moses. Moses' eyes focus on the courtier who speaks in Pharaoh's place. Accordingly, to

label this illustration an illumination of Exodus 5:2 would be only partly true. It contains the germ of the text filtered through the experience of people who know—either firsthand, or through reliable transmission—what courtly interactions are like: they know that the ruler is not so easily accessed. They wish to emphasize the haughtiness of Pharaoh and perhaps to comment on contemporary experience of royal distance, inaccessibility, and arrogance.⁴⁰

On folio 11r (fig. 53; plate 36, bottom right) Pharaoh's second meeting with Moses and Aaron is shown, on the occasion of which Aaron's staff turns into a serpent. The illumination depicts the moment when Aaron's serpent devours the serpents created by Pharaoh's magicians. Aaron holds a large serpent by the tail; his other hand is splayed and covers his heart so that his fingers rest on the opposite sleeve in a gesture either of legerdemain ("Nothing up my sleeves...") or deference ("What you are witnessing is not my power, but God's work"). While Pharaoh still displays his casually majestic attitude, he has lost hold of his ankle because he is using the hand that held it to point toward the serpents. He has also lost his scepter because he has become more personally involved, now raising in a questioning gesture the hand that held the scepter. A seated magician holds two small snakes by the tails (their heads are in the mouth of Aaron's serpent), and a seated adviser, along with the standing adviser (who now cowers behind the throne), display questioning gestures similar to Pharaoh's. Moses and Pharaoh are now looking directly at each other, and Moses addresses Pharaoh's inquiry directly, raising a finger toward the sky.⁴¹

Again the authorship departs from the biblical text in order to amplify its ideas through the iconography. Although in Exodus 7:9 God predicts that, prior to the miracle, Pharaoh will ask Moses to produce his marvel, in the actual scene (Exodus 7:10–13) Pharaoh does not speak at all to Moses. Yet in the illumination he points at the serpents and makes an inquiry that Moses answers by pointing heavenward. Pharaoh is only semirelaxed now, this unnerving experience causing him to lose some of his sang-froid. He becomes still more engaged, addressing Moses directly and receiving, presumably, an answer about the power of God—an interchange not present in the biblical text.

Faced with the plague of blood, Pharaoh has become unsettled (plate 36, lower left). He stands, throneless, on the bank of the Nile, and points accusingly at Moses and Aaron; he pulls his cloak around himself, recoiling from the stinking river, filled with dead and putrid fish (Exodus 7:21).⁴² The remainder of the plague illuminations again find Pharaoh seated, but never again in a position of "ease"; on the contrary, he descends into increasing levels of distress. During the plague of frogs (plate 37, top right), Pharaoh is



FIGURE 53
Pharaoh is more agitated and converses with Moses directly. Golden Haggadah, fol. 11r (detail)

“attacked” by a frog that jumps straight into his hand as he gestures helplessly—both hands raised, showing his palms in surrender. The plague of lice (top left) finds him displaying a “debilitated” gesture. His hands are limp, his fingers askew, in an impotent parallel to his magicians’ description of the plague as the “finger of God” (Exodus 8:15). In the plague of *‘arov* (bottom right) Pharaoh again displays this gesture of helplessness. Here the authorship decided to follow the interpreters, who generally understand the *‘arov* not as swarms of insects but as swarms of wild beasts. This, of course, heightens the pathos of the depiction. Although the authorship seems concerned with preserving Pharaoh’s general dignity, depicting him being attacked by a frog or squirrel provides a none-too-subtle way to indicate his complete humiliation.⁴³

The cattle plague, or murrain (bottom left), presents an interesting iconographic problem as well as an opportunity for moralizing and for creating an exegetical connection of sorts between this plague and earlier incidents in the narrative and iconography. Neither in the case of the *‘arov* nor in the case of the murrain does Moses or Aaron “perform” the “signs.” The *‘arov* simply “comes,” without any human agency (Exodus 8:20). The murrain is described as the “hand of the LORD” (Exodus 9:3) and is accomplished directly by God (Exodus 9:6). The authorship naturally included the image of Moses discoursing with Pharaoh during the plague of *‘arov*, as this interchange is described in the text (Exodus 8:21–28). But in the case of the murrain, no such conversation occurs, and so the authorship omits Moses and Aaron, who neither initiate the plague nor discuss it with Pharaoh; they also leave Pharaoh himself entirely out of the picture. In the place of Moses and Aaron, Pharaoh, and his councilors, are four Egyptians. Two are lowering a sheep and a goat from a tower. The other two are literally mourning the death of their animals. One rends his garment, and the other stands mournfully, his head inclined like St. John in contemporary representations of the Crucifixion. Dead on the earth in the foreground are a horse, a camel, and a donkey. Behind them are other animals—sheep and, possibly, cattle—but these are deliberately undifferentiated, in stark contradistinction to prominent and identifiable animals in the foreground. Together with the sheep and the goat, the horse, camel, and donkey represent all the species of animals that God, in Exodus 9:3, decrees will be struck by the plague. But why are they portrayed in this distinctive manner, the sheep and goat literally hanging in the center of the composition, at eye level with the two Egyptian mourners?⁴⁴

The illumination appears in the bottom left of the right-hand folio. This is the identical position of the illumination of Pharaoh’s decree against the Israelite firstborn on folio 8v (plate 33). There is a measure-for-measure relationship between the two illuminations. In the illustration of the murrain, the grief of the mourners of the beasts

is palpable, but not a tear is shed over the infanticide in the parallel illumination. The comparison implies that for the Egyptians, human lives are cheap, and that property is as important for them as people are for the Israelites. The divine punishment for this attitude and behavior, of course, is the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn.⁴⁵

The sheep and goat being lowered from the tower once again specifically represent that class of animals appropriate for the Passover sacrifice. These, it will be recalled, were first depicted in the scene of Adam naming the animals (plate 27, top right). Then, in the scenes of Noah emerging from the ark (plate 27, bottom left), the ram of the *'Akedah* (plate 29, top left), and the restored Passover sacrifice (plate 40, bottom left), sheep are shown, as here, in a “suspended” position typical of the draining of the blood of sacrificial victims. The negative comparison with the Passover sacrifice is clear here. In the Egyptian context, the sheep and goats are slain because of the disobedience of the Egyptians; the loss causes them to mourn. But sheep and goats of the Passover sacrifice are sacrificed in joy and thanksgiving as a sign of closeness with God and obedience to divine commandment.

Additionally, as it recalls the murder of the Israelite newborns, this illumination presages the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn. Sheep and goats are among the animals the firstborn of which one is required to bring as a sacrifice (Exodus 34:19). The animals at the foot of the tower are all solid-hoofed or toed ungulates from the class of nonkosher animals. They represent that class of animals the firstborn males of which need to be “redeemed” with a sheep or a goat (Exodus 34:20). But like the sheep and goat, they are also dead and hence unredeemable. The murrain is used here as a foreshadowing of the utter “irredeemability” of the Egyptians: their firstborn will be slain and there will be no possibility of substitute.⁴⁶

In the illumination of the plague of boils, Pharaoh is shown in a yet further state of debilitation (plate 38, top right). He sits on his throne, and, like the two councilors or magicians seated at his feet, he is covered with spots. Like them, he is barefoot—the only occasion in the manuscript in which he is thus depicted. The spots are subtle, and, with the exception of his feet, Pharaoh is completely clothed. The authorship apparently took care to avoid portraying Pharaoh in an excessively undignified position, so it conveyed the illness via the spots and the bare feet, deferring more extreme undress to other figures in the illumination. The two councilors—perhaps the magicians who “were unable to confront [lit., could not stand before] Moses” (Exodus 9:11)—are dressed in their under robes, indicating their impotence.⁴⁷

Two other figures are present in the illustration, uncalled for in the text but added in order to further emphasize the abjection of Pharaoh. One is a herdsman who, along with his animals, has been struck with boils. This allows the authorship to show a figure

stripped to the waist (as, according to the commentators, the boils were either accompanied by or came as the result of searing heat) and covered with boils, a condition in which Pharaoh, by the Golden Haggadah's standard of "dignified depiction for aristocrats," could not be shown. In exposing his body the herdsman thus points to and literally exposes what is covered, and thus hidden, on Pharaoh's body.⁴⁸

Finally, there is a man standing by the throne, speaking with the king, who is identified in the text caption as a "physician who has come before Pharaoh." Pharaoh utilizes a discursive, demanding gesture that is also a gesture of enumeration (counting out the five previous plagues, or enumerating points with the index finger of one hand on the other hand, beginning with the thumb). He seems to complain, "There have been five plagues so far, and some of them have been 'answered' by my magicians. But they have been no help with this one. Because it is a medical problem, I've called you. Are you telling me you can't help me?" The doctor points up with one index finger, and the fingers of his other hand are splayed as the hand twists up and out in a motion that combines the previously observed gesture of helplessness with an element of inquiry. He seems to protest, "What can I do about the boils? It is the work of God." This exchange only makes Pharaoh look worse. Having abandoned his magicians, or having been abandoned by them, he enters into this discourse with a doctor in a last-ditch effort to solve the problem through "science." This attempt is, of course, doomed to failure: concerning the boils, Ibn 'Ezra explicitly states, "Although the magicians were unaffected by the frogs or the beasts (having found with their wisdom some means of natural science to relieve themselves somewhat), their wisdom did not avail them this time."⁴⁹ Pharaoh, then, here engages in an act of desperation made even more pitiable, ridiculous, and, most of all, ironic, by the fact that the doctor himself is covered with boils. "Physician," the viewer is moved to expostulate, "heal thyself!"⁵⁰

The illustration of the plague of hail (plate 38, top left) shows a distinctly disempowered Pharaoh. He is no longer commanding or demanding but conceding and pleading. One hand displays the now-familiar gesture of helplessness, and the other is raised in a plea for Moses to pray for the cessation of the hail (Exodus 9:33). Moses' prayerful gesture—raising both hands—is notable here. In his commentary on Exodus 9:14, R. Baḥye emphasizes Moses' raising of his hands heavenward, asserting that because the plague of hail came from God in a direct, unmediated way, it was so awesome that it required special mediative effort—involving the raising of the hands with the ten fingers paralleling the ten *sefirot*—to cause it to abate.⁵¹

Pharaoh does not appear at all in the depiction of the plague of locusts (plate 38, bottom right), in accordance with the text, which states that before the plague occurred, Moses and Aaron were driven from Pharaoh's presence (Exodus 10:11).

The authorship grappled with how to present the total eclipse of light in the plague of darkness and still show the reactions of Pharaoh and the Egyptians (plate 38, bottom left). It solved the problem by inserting the “courtly” detail of a falcon on a perch. The falcon is unhooded and untethered yet sitting calmly, which would be unlikely if there was any light present. Pharaoh is shown seated once again, not because he is displaying his majesty but because he is unable to rise (per Exodus 10:23). He and other Egyptians feel about in the darkness, displaying confused gestures that contrast with the highly focused upward glances and prayers of Moses and Aaron in the quadrants directly above (plate 39, top left). This is Pharaoh at his most abject and incapacitated, beyond pleading, his previously eloquent and discursive gestures reduced to inarticulate groping.⁵²

When Pharaoh finally calls for Moses to relieve Egypt of the plague of darkness, he declares, “Be gone from me! Take care not to see me again, for the moment you look upon my face you shall die.” Moses replies, “You have spoken rightly. I shall not see your face again!” (Exodus 10:28–29). Indeed, in the Golden Haggadah, Pharaoh does not appear in the illumination of the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn, and Moses turns his back on him in the Exodus scene (plate 39, top). Even in the illustration of the drowning of Pharaoh and his army in the Sea of Reeds (bottom left) Moses does not “see [Pharaoh’s] face again.” He turns his head over his shoulder with a demonstrative gesture that encompasses all the drowning Egyptians. His rod divides the scene, the lower end pointing toward the crowned figure of the drowned Pharaoh (at whom he does not look), and its upper end toward a woman holding a baby.

The plague scenes present a subtle and complex choreography among the central actors of the drama of the Exodus that is public, courtly, and diplomatic, and that aids the apprehension of crucial aspects of the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in Catalonia at the time of the creation of the Golden Haggadah through the eyes of its authorship. The woman holding the baby introduces another aspect of the world of the authorship, in this case a much less public and much more intimate one. It is to her presence, and to that of her sisters, that I turn next.

8

Women Hidden in Plain Sight

IT IS THE WOMAN holding the baby, and not Moses, in fact, who leads the rest of the Israelites in the depiction of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds in the Golden Haggadah (fig. 58; plate 39, bottom left). But she is not alone. The manuscript contains no fewer than forty-six prominent depictions of women. The biblical sequence culminates with an image of seven women in the illustration of the Song of Miriam, and women and girls are conspicuously involved in the scenes of contemporary Passover preparations (plate 40, top register and bottom right).

The large number of women depicted in this manuscript has gone unremarked upon in the scholarly literature, and no attempt has been made to interpret their potential importance in the illuminations. The impression one gets from most accounts of the Golden Haggadah is that the women depicted simply represent figures whose presence is required by the narratives depicted. But the fact that more images of women appear in the Golden Haggadah than in any of the other Spanish haggadot seems to me to be the obvious result of authorial choices to illustrate particular narratives in the biblical sequence and to configure their iconography in distinctive ways. How and why did the authorship arrive at this particular selection and disposition of the narrative scenes? And how did it do so in such a way as to consciously increase the presence of women?

While there are no rules for a minimal required iconography in illuminated haggadot, there is indisputably a core textual narrative of the haggadah; that which halakhically qualifies as fulfilling the commandment of *sippur yezi'at Mizrayim* and constitutes the nucleus of what it means to “recite the haggadah” on the eve of Passover. The potentially illustratable narrative scenes evoked by this highly compressed account include the idolatry of the primordial ancestors of the Hebrews, the covenantal promise to Abraham and its fulfillment in the birth of Isaac, the division of inheritance between Esau and Jacob, the descent of Jacob and his sons into Egypt, the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt (the ten plagues are mentioned in the exegesis), the redemption from Egypt, the splitting of the sea (including the drowning of the Egyptians and the salvation of the Israelites), the desert wanderings, the revelation on Mount Sinai, and the building of the Temple. What is decisively omitted is any mention of Moses; the entire redemption is described as being effected by God, “and none other.”¹

I have described these scenes as *potentially* illustratable because I wish to avoid the trap of asserting that there was a concretely identifiable and universally “mandatory”



FIGURE 54 LEFT
Female figure mourning the
"tearing of Joseph." Golden
Haggadah, fol. 6v (detail)



FIGURE 55 RIGHT
Egyptian drowning a male
Israelite baby. Golden Haggadah,
fol. 8v (detail)



FIGURE 60 LEFT
Crowned female mourning the death
of the firstborn. Golden Haggadah,
fol. 14v (detail)



FIGURE 56 RIGHT
Rachel, daughter of Shuteleh, holding
her baby over the brick mold. Golden
Haggadah, fol. 11r (detail)



FIGURE 57 RIGHT
Two women with a baby lead the
Exodus. Golden Haggadah, fol. 14v
(detail)



FIGURE 58 CENTER
Two women with a baby lead the
Crossing of the Sea of Reeds. Golden
Haggadah, fol. 14v (detail)



FIGURE 59 LEFT
A woman with seven children receives
Passover foodstuffs from the house-
holder. Golden Haggadah, fol. 15r
(detail)

sequence, and that deviations from that sequence represent misunderstandings of some fixed and binding canon. Some variation on the core narrative of *sippur yezi'at Mizrayim* is depicted graphically in haggadot from the fourteenth through the eighteenth centuries. All these illustrated haggadot contain images that devolve from this core sequence, some omitting illustrations from this core, others including illustrations beyond the core, but all relating to it in some way. Even the earliest illuminated haggadot use some elements from scripture to amplify the bare-bones narrative of the “core,” with the effect of ensuring some consistency; for instance, Moses, nearly absent in the haggadah text, often appears in the illustrations. The Birds’ Head Haggadah, for example, hews fairly closely to the schematic narrative. It includes images of Moses, it omits images of the plagues, and it supplements the core only with what I have called the “mazah cycle”: scenes of the Egyptian pursuit of the Israelites as they prepare their dough, and scenes of contemporary mazah baking. It is my conjecture that in most cases these omissions and supplementations were deliberate and considered rather than mistakes and misunderstandings, but this can of course be proved only by a thorough and open-minded examination of each example.²

A wider repertoire of illustrations is developed in the various seventeenth-century printed haggadot from Italy and Amsterdam, and the printed versions and illuminated manuscripts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from North and Central Europe that emulated them. Some of these new images emerge from the haggadah text itself (various versions of the “Four Sons” and the five rabbis of Bnei Brak), others are based on the biblical text (scenes from the infancy and youth of Moses from the book of Exodus), and still others depict eschatological themes (Elijah the Prophet, the rebuilt Temple). But by including scenes from the entire biblical narrative of Exodus, and, in some cases, from Genesis as well, it is the fourteenth-century Spanish haggadot rather than these later examples that stretch the iconographic repertoire to the greatest extent.³

A TYPOLOGY OF SCENES: CENTRAL AND PERIPHERAL

To understand the Golden Haggadah, perhaps the richest and most complex of these fourteenth-century Spanish haggadot, it is necessary to organize the illustrations into two parallel typologies: one for the kinds of scenes appearing in the manuscript, and the other for depictions of characters within those scenes. First, the kinds of scenes depicted in the Golden Haggadah: The broadest distinction can be drawn between scenes that are central to illustrating the core narrative of the Exodus and scenes that are peripheral to illustrating that narrative. This distinction emerges from the assumption that the authorship had the option of illustrating the story in the simplest, most direct way: by employing only those scenes that appear in *sippur yezi'at Mizrayim* as narrowly, halakhically defined. Accordingly, when narrative scenes are added to this bare-bones narrative,

they need to be scrutinized with an eye to determining if they were included to make a distinct exegetical point, or to advance a specific view or version of the narrative, perhaps ultimately in order to highlight an overall theme of particular importance to the authorship. One must always allow for the possibility that seemingly peripheral scenes are contextually meaningful in some way beyond the requirements of the narrative, conceivably touching on the specific circumstances surrounding the commission of the particular manuscript.⁴

How might this meaningfulness manifest itself practically? Since I am examining images of women in this chapter, I will use depictions of female figures as my example. Contextual meaningfulness can be general: a surfeit of images of women may appear in a manuscript commissioned by or for a female patron. Or it can have general appeal while also bearing a specific, localized message. To contrive an entirely theoretical example, one might encounter a multiplication of the visual cycles of narratives involving heroic women in a given manuscript. A preponderance of such exempla might be used to celebrate a particular historical event in a particular community in which salvation was effected by a woman, and to serve as inspiration for further heroism. Even if I cannot determine the particular community or circumstances being addressed, the moral message may still ring out loud and clear. Of course, contextual meaningfulness might be very restricted indeed. Imagine that in a particular manuscript there is an expansion of the iconography of the narratives involving Abraham to include many more scenes in which Sarah appears than are found in other haggadot of the same provenance. In such a case, this might be traceable to the fact that the female patron's name was Sarah, or that the male patron had a wife or a daughter of that name.

It is, of course, impossible to determine meanings for potentially contextually significant iconography with any degree of certainty. For instance, one may note an emphasis on images of heroic women in a given manuscript, and might cautiously opine that the manuscript was intended to convey a moral message. But unless there is specific, verifiable outside evidence of the particular social circumstances of the context in which the manuscript was produced—a town, a congregation, or a family—one cannot be certain about the historical basis for the specific intended moral message. Or there may be a marked preponderance of depictions of a particular biblical character in a given manuscript, but unless there is corroborating evidence that there was a person of that name in the patron's family, the observation of the superfluity of depictions of that character must remain in the realm of interesting information, and those images revert to being merely incidental. However, in cases where several corroborating factors appear together, one may be on firmer ground in speculating on the significance of the iconography. Such speculations are statements of possibility or, at best, probability, but it seems better to articulate them than to leave them unconsidered.

Alongside the illustrations that cry out for interpretation because they seem to be emphasized despite their apparently peripheral relationship to the core narrative, the core narrative itself should be scrutinized for clues to such contextual meaningfulness, particularly if its scenes seem to contain unique or specific iconographic emphases, added or omitted details, or adjustments or alterations to an orientation common to the scene in its depictions in other manuscripts.

A TYPOLOGY OF INDIVIDUAL FEMALE FIGURES

Let me then propose a typology to characterize the depictions of individual women in the Golden Haggadah. Some are principal actors, the central subjects of the narrative immediately at hand. Such *necessary* figures include Eve, Sarah, Lot's wife and daughters, Rebecca, and Potiphar's wife, as well as (possibly) the midwives in the scene of the casting of the newborns into the Nile, and Miriam in the scene of the finding of Moses. Others are *corroborative* figures: women who do not advance the narrative as actors but who are mentioned in the scriptural text, like Noah's wife and daughters-in-law. Finally, there are *incidental* figures: women who appear to "fill out" various scenes, whose presence is narratologically plausible, but who are not explicitly mentioned or particularly emphasized in the scriptural narrative or the text of the haggadah. In the Golden Haggadah such figures include the Egyptian women afflicted with lice and those mourning the slain firstborn, as well as the Israelite women at the Exodus and at the Sea of Reeds.

Because they are not intrinsic to the narrative, these corroborative and incidental figures, like peripheral scenes, invite scrutiny as potentially meaningful outside the bounds of that narrative, possibly touching on the specific circumstances surrounding the commission of the manuscript. But even "necessary" figures, like central scenes, must be examined for variations in emphases, details, or orientation that may provide clues to their contextual meaningfulness.

In the case of the Golden Haggadah, the considerable number of depictions of women include every possible representative of the "necessary," "corroborative," and "incidental" classes. When taken together, they are certainly substantial in number, and that fact alone should encourage one to consider the importance of women for the authorship of the manuscript. But even more interesting is the sizable number of images of women that are added to the basic scriptural narrative, either because of their inclusion in scenes that seem to be peripheral or because of how they appear in scenes that are obviously central. In the Golden Haggadah they number far more, indeed, than in the case of any other comparable manuscript, even that of the Golden Haggadah's so-called "Sister" (London, British Library, MS Or. 2884, Passover Haggadah, Catalonia, c. 1320–1330). The Golden Haggadah, moreover, employs these female figures toward a particular purpose in a remarkably consistent manner, unlike many other manuscripts,

where female figures peripheral to the narrative are added inconsistently, sometimes simply to fill out scenes.

Indeed, it would not be farfetched to assert that the overall conceptualization of the opening folia of the Golden Haggadah was based on a desire on the part of the authorship to include as many women as possible. A survey of fourteenth-century Spanish haggadot reveals that there were two basic configurations available to the patrons of this manuscript. One class of manuscripts included narrative illustrations of the Book of Exodus only; another group introduced scenes from Genesis as well. In choosing between these two possible types the authorship of the Golden Haggadah had three choices in terms of the depiction of women. The minimal approach would have been to adopt the Exodus-only model and include only one or two “necessary” women: the midwives, Miriam, Pharaoh’s daughter, and possibly Zipporah (depending on whether the scene depicting Moses’ family’s flight into Egypt was included). An intermediate approach might have included some “incidental” women: Israelite women as slaves in Egypt or at the Exodus, or perhaps Egyptian women afflicted by the plague of lice. In the case of either the minimalist or the intermediate approach, the whole of Genesis, with all its many women, could have been omitted, and *sippur yezi’at Mizrayim* could have been told just as effectively. But, happily for students of iconography, the authorship of the Golden Haggadah rejected both the minimalist and even the intermediate approach in favor of the most broadly narratologically inclusive approach.⁵

By the minimalist or default definition of *sippur yezi’at Mizrayim* none of the many women in the Genesis portion of the manuscript would have been “necessary.” But by making the conscious choice to view *sippur yezi’at Mizrayim* as a foreordained drama, with roots stretching back to Adam’s primeval naming of the animals, the authorship elected to follow the “Genesis-inclusive” configuration. Because Genesis is a book in which women figure far more significantly as major characters than they do in Exodus, women, as might be expected, appear more frequently and more prominently in the illuminations of the “Genesis-inclusive” configuration. The choice to include Genesis was a choice to include women. Accordingly, all the women depicted need to be scrutinized as potentially significant. Some, of course, will turn out to truly be only narratologically necessary, corroborative, or incidental. But others, I believe, will reveal themselves to be more nuanced, bearing dual significance. They will of course satisfy the demand of the text that is being illustrated, but they will also bear reading as a possible response to the circumstances of the manuscript’s creation.

In order to parse the iconography of women in the Golden Haggadah I will focus on consecutively closer levels. First, the force of the numbers and prominence of images of women contained in the manuscript move me to note the importance of women to the authorship. Second, I observe how—by means of their physical placement on the folio,

significant details included, or a combination of both—particular figures are highlighted, causing me to attend more closely to images that might otherwise have been somewhat “invisible,” either because they have been deemed “simply” to illustrate the narrative or because they have been labeled nonessential or incidental. Then I note how the figures that bear these special emphases exhibit striking thematic commonalities across the whole group of images. Finally, in an admittedly bold and speculative interpretive move, I offer conjecture regarding how these depictions might all point to a topos of special significance for the patrons of the Golden Haggadah in particular.

FORCE OF NUMBERS AND PROMINENCE OF IMAGES

Even among the haggadot of the “Genesis-inclusive” class, women appear most frequently and most prominently in the Golden Haggadah. The women in the Genesis illuminations include Eve, Noah’s wife and daughters-in-law, Sarah, Lot’s wife and daughters, Rebecca, Rachel (possibly twice), Leah, possibly Dina, and Potiphar’s wife. In the Exodus illustrations one encounters the midwives, Pharaoh’s daughter and her female servants, Miriam, Zipporah, two women among the Israelite slaves, three Egyptian women suffering from lice, three female figures (including one who is crowned) among the mourners for the slain Egyptian firstborn, four female Israelites leaving Egypt, at least one leading the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, Miriam and six Israelite women singing at the Sea of Reeds’ shore, a woman receiving *mazot* and *harosset* from a householder, and a woman and a girl cleaning a home for Passover. The prominence of women is emphasized by their placement in the scenes in which they appear. They are often at the physical center or are the iconographic focus of the composition of the miniature in which they appear, their visual centrality in many cases corroborating their narratological importance.⁶

Before I commence a systematic analysis of each female figure in the manuscript I would like to present two examples of depictions that represent potentially “invisible” types. The first—the example of Miriam and the women of Israel singing after the crossing of the Sea of Reeds on folio 15r (fig. 61; plate 40, top right)—initially seems incidental, yet it ultimately attracts the eye by virtue of its scale and the audacity of its construction. The second—that of Sarah laughing in the tent at the annunciation of Isaac’s birth (see fig. 49; plate 28, bottom left)—escapes attention because, on the contrary, it seems so obviously narratologically necessary; it is only by an examination of very subtle chiasmic parallels and small details that one can ascertain its potential significance beyond the narrative.

Miriam and the women of Israel are not necessary to the narrative at all. Indeed, some manuscripts, like the Rylands Haggadah and BL Or. 1404, for instance, omit this scene, ending their series of “historical” depictions with the crossing of the Sea of Reeds. There, the crossing is the central iconographic event, the song secondary. Moreover, since



the biblical text records the entire song of Moses, but only a single line from Miriam's song (implying that it was identical to Moses'), the scene depicted here seems doubly nonessential.

But the iconographic treatment of these figures in the Golden Haggadah indicates otherwise. The images of women here are not only the focus of the composition, they also are unique in the entire cycle in terms of their size and scale. While most of the figures in the manuscript are two and one-quarter inches tall or smaller (accounting for age, perspective, and so forth), and always appear in landscape or interior settings, Miriam and the women of Israel stand at a uniform two and one half inches—proportionally a dramatic difference from the standard height in a space only three inches high in total. They occupy the whole of the quadrant in which they appear and are thus taller, bigger, and closer than any other figure in the illuminations.

Miriam and the women occupy a “spaceless” space, right up against the picture plane—with no residue of landscape, architecture, or history—no sign of the carnage at the Sea of Reeds. On folio 28r of the Sarajevo Haggadah, Miriam and the dancing women appear against a blue-checked background, but many other scenes are similarly shown against backdrops devoid of landscape or architecture. In the Golden Haggadah this is the only scene that is spaceless, hence contextless, hence timeless, hence eternal. Wrenched from its historical context, it stands as the pivot between the events of the Exodus on the opposite page and the scenes that follow it on its page,

FIGURE 61
Miriam and the Israelite women singing on the shores of the Sea of Reeds. Golden Haggadah, fol. 15r (detail)

combining contemporary Passover preparations with a restored Passover sacrifice in messianic times.⁷

Even among the manuscripts that include the Song of Miriam, the Golden Haggadah is the only one that enlarges the proportions of the figures and places them within a timeless space in this particular way. The dissonance between the scene's status as ostensibly "unnecessary" or "corroborative" and the extraordinary emphasis placed on the figures seems designed to call attention to them. It shifts their status from "corroborative detail" to "potentially otherwise significant."

The image of Sarah laughing in the tent at the annunciation of Isaac's birth, unlike that of Miriam and the women, is obviously narratologically significant and fully conforms to the text it ostensibly illustrates. Sarah is found in her "expected" place: in the tent, per Genesis 18:9. But as I have noted, Sarah's particular position on the page—in direct chiasmic opposition to the figure of the drunken and castrated Noah—invites a reading of this scene of her receiving the blessing of preternatural fertility in parallel with Noah's shaming and barrenness, contrasting the lack or loss of future offspring in his case with the miraculous continuation of the Patriarchal family line in hers. Sarah is a figure in the narrative, but she also becomes a symbol of fertility, an icon of a woman who faced potential childlessness but who is now blessed with children; she is an emblem of increase against Noah's figuration of loss.

So the image of Miriam and the daughters of Israel is more important than it "should be," were it a merely corroborative image. It serves to bring women quite literally to the fore in a forceful and significant way, rather than relegating them to the background or projecting them as appendages both of men and of the narrative. And the image of Sarah is more complex than it seems. It embodies a potential constellation of meanings that push it beyond the bounds of literal illustration of a particular biblical verse. An extension and intensification of emphasis on the relationship between loss of offspring and blessing of fertility may be iconographically meaningful in response to the particular circumstances of the manuscript's commission.

Let me, then, proceed with an analysis of the manuscript that is mindful of my general observations about the number and prominence of women within it. I do this keeping the images of Miriam and Sarah before me as exempla of the transformation of necessary, corroborative, or incidental images into potentially significant iconography within the Golden Haggadah.

NARRATOLOGICALLY NECESSARY

Beginning with the women in Genesis, I note that some, like Eve, Sarah, Lot's wife and daughters, Rebecca, and Potiphar's wife, are obviously narratologically necessary because they are featured—and take an active part—in scenes central to the Genesis narrative.

But since the majority of the scenes from Genesis depicted in the manuscript are peripheral to *sippur yezi'at Mizrayim*, most of the instances in which these women appear are thus narratologically unnecessary to the Exodus narrative. Nonetheless, some of these figures, like Sarah, might bear meaning beyond their function as actors, however significant, in the narrative. As I proceed, I will note that they each appear either in a scene associated with fertility or in one of separation from—or loss of—children.

A couple of other women seem to be less narratologically critical even in the Genesis narrative, but, like Miriam and the daughters of Israel, they receive a strong emphasis in the iconography that seems incommensurate with their relatively minor or peripheral place in the narrative. Accordingly, their appearance should be noted, and in some cases it requires explanation.

Although the depiction of Noah's ark (plate 27, bottom left) is crucial to the Genesis narrative, one could argue that Noah's wife and daughters-in-law could have been omitted because they are simply present in the narrative, not active participants in it. To "cover" the Flood narrative the authorship could have commissioned a scene of Noah sending the dove, as in the Sarajevo Haggadah (folio 5v), which would not have necessitated the inclusion of the female members of Noah's family. Instead, it chose a scene in which the biblical text specifically calls for the inclusion of the women: "So Noah came out, together with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives" (Genesis 8.18). Moreover, the illumination emphasizes the inclusion of women by their placement. While the Sister Haggadah, for instance, also depicts Noah's wife and daughters-in-law (folio 2v, bottom), only the Golden Haggadah places them in such a central position, physically in front of Noah's sons, in contradiction of the order in which they are presented in the biblical text.

The scene of the fording of the Jabbok (plate 30, top right) is seemingly secondary to the central narrative. The authorship might have focused exclusively on Jacob wrestling the angel, which is the more significant scene, the denouement of the narrative. One would think that the emphasis should be on the wrestling, not on the manner in which Jacob gets to the venue. And it is Jacob who should be the focus of attention, not the members of his entourage. But in this scene the authorship divides the quadrant diagonally, placing equal emphasis on the image of Jacob's family—Rachel and Leah and the children—crossing the Jabbok, and on the one of Jacob wrestling the angel. The scene of the fording of the Jabbok is included in order to once again enable the prominent depiction of female figures. Recall how the authorship made the conscious decision to choose a particular configuration of the scene depicting Noah's exit from the ark partially in order to facilitate the prominent and central depiction of Noah's wife and daughters-in-law. Here, too, Rachel and Leah appear at the center of the composition, which is designed to highlight them in the same way so that their presence is equal to the scene of Jacob's wrestling the angel.⁸

There is a single female figure within this group on the page who appears larger than Jacob, and, in fact, even larger than the wrestling figures. She is shown immediately left of center in the composition, in a soft pink cloak (repeated on the female figure in the scene of the lamenting over Joseph's coat on plate 31, bottom right). She mirrors the angel in the other part of the quadrant. It is my contention that she represents Rachel. Taller than any other figure on the page, her body is fully visible (Genesis 19:17 specifically mentions Rachel's shapeliness), and her face is serene, with her hair peeking out from beneath her loosely set kerchief (the same verse mentions her facial beauty). By way of contrast, the female farthest to the left is smaller, her body mostly obscured, and her troubled, rather severe face is visible head-on, with no hair showing beneath her tightly bound kerchief. Her cloak is red. She, I believe, is meant to represent Leah. Jacob stands between them, pointing at the woman in front of him, sending her ahead, while the other woman remains behind him. The identification of the woman in front as Leah and the one behind as Rachel is corroborated by the description of Jacob's actions in Genesis 33:1–2 and 7, where he sends Leah ahead of him first, with Rachel and her children coming last. Here the figure of Rachel overlaps Jacob's. She is closer to the picture plane than the ostensible protagonist, while the three other male figures appear only implied, as heads of hair behind Rachel, Jacob, and Leah.

SEEMINGLY PERIPHERAL FIGURES

In the Exodus cycle, the authorship again seems deliberately to have chosen scenes that go beyond the minimalist or default for *sippur yezi'at Mizrayim*; scenes peripheral to the narrative but involving depictions of women. Some, like Moses' saving the daughters of Jethro (plate 34, bottom left) and the scene of the Flight into Egypt (plate 35, top left), evince thematic commonalities. But even before one parses them for a continuity of exegetical meaning, the simple fact of their inclusion calls attention to the women depicted.

Others, like the three Egyptian women afflicted with lice (plate 37, top left), or the three mourning for the dead firstborn (plate 39, top right), may be classified under the "corroborative" rubric. In the case of the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn the women may appear because scripture mentions the plague as striking the "houses" of the Egyptians (Exodus 12:30). Rabbinic literature equated a man's house with his wife, to the extent that the word "house" was used as a euphemism in polite conversation for "wife."⁹ But beyond this rather tendentious allusion to a rabbinic euphemism, their inclusion is better warranted by the widest circle of motivation on the part of the authorship of the Golden Haggadah: the desire to include, and thus to emphasize, women. They are representative of a pattern in the manuscript of women being represented and, in fact, emphasized where they are not "required." All of this would seem to indicate that the Golden Haggadah authorship had a particular interest in the depiction of women.

A PRECIOUS GIFT

This is all I can say with certainty. But a bit of speculation may be warranted, if for no reason other than to stimulate scholarly debate and to avoid succumbing to interpretive paralysis. What might have been the motivation for the authorship's interest in the depiction of women? Might the inclusion of an unprecedented number of female figures in the Golden Haggadah be an indication that it was created for a female patron?

Although scholars know nothing about the illuminators or the original patrons of the Golden Haggadah, one can glean some information about some of its later owners through a title page added in 1602. This page contains an inscription celebrating the occasion of the manuscript's being given as a gift at the wedding of Rosa Gallico and Elia Rava at Carpi, Italy (plate 26). In his monograph on the Golden Haggadah (originally published as the introduction to the facsimile volume), Bezalel Narkiss wrote: "The earliest known owner of the manuscript was Rabbi Yoav Gallico of Asti. . . . On 12 October 1602 he became the rabbi of the Jewish community in Mantua, and on 25 October that same year he was in Carpi. . . . when he gave the Haggadah to 'his learned son-in-law Eliah, son of Menahem Rava.' . . . The inscription within the arched opening states the fact of the wedding gift, and gives the place and date of the occasion." This seems fairly straightforward. But Narkiss seems to have revised his thesis in a later publication. There he wrote: "The manuscript was given by Rabbi Joab Gallico of Asti (near Turin) to his daughter Rosa, on the occasion of her marriage." What, then, does the title page actually say about who gave and who received this precious gift? In fact, the dedicatory text reads as follows in a literal translation with the problematic first word left untranslated with the lines configured as they are in the Hebrew inscription (fig. 62):

NTNV as a gift [. . .] the honored Mistress Rosa,
(May she be blessed among the women of the tent), daughter of our illustrious
Honored Teacher Rabbi Yoav
Gallico, (may his Rock preserve him) to his son-in-law, the learned
Honored Teacher Elia (may his Rock preserve him)
son of the sage, our Honored Teacher, the Rabbi R. Menahem Rava (May he live
many good years)
on the day of his wedding and the day of the rejoicing of his heart,
here at Carpi, the tenth of the month of *Heshvan*, *Heh Shin Samekh Gimel* (1602)

An understanding of this inscription — of who gave what to whom — must rest substantially on its first verb (NTNV) and the lacuna after it (this is not an erasure, the word "to" or "by" is simply not supplied), which pose difficulties.

Narkiss reads NTNV thus (I omit the honorifics in all the following):

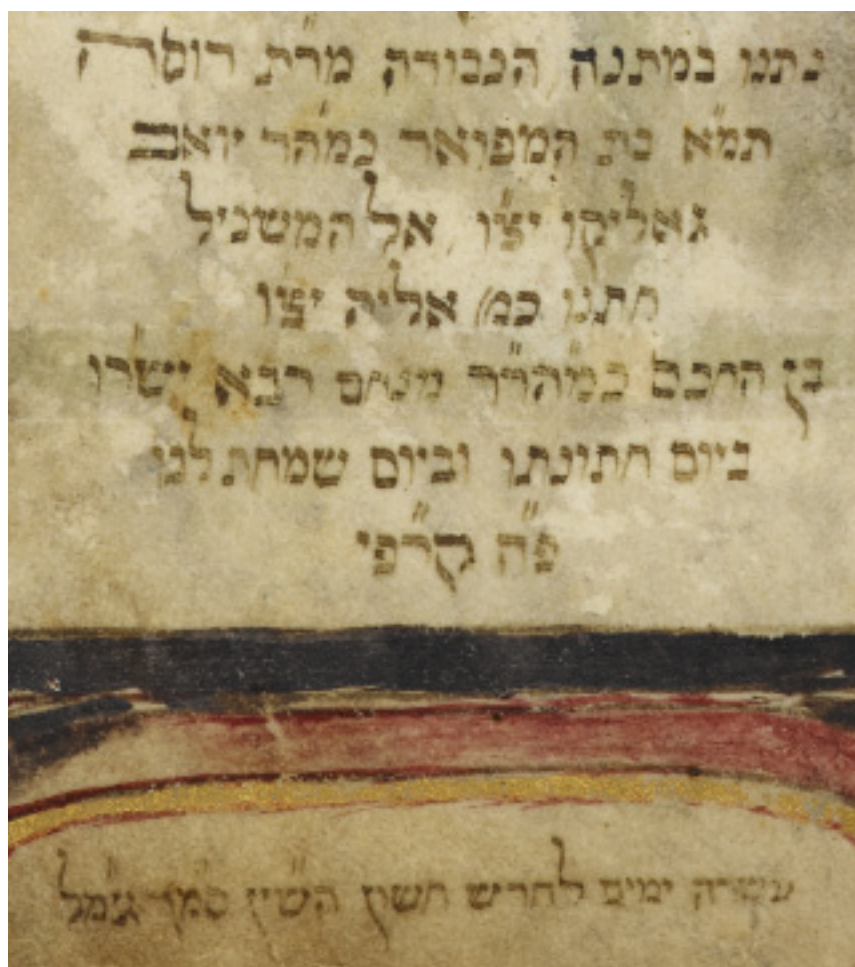


FIGURE 62
Dedication leaf of the Golden Haggadah, added in 1609, detail of inscription, fol. 2r, detail

He gave it [Netano] as a gift... [ignores references to Mistress Rosa] ... to his son-in-law... Elia.

Ignoring the references to Mistress Rosa, a reading with this vocalization implies both a male giver (R. Yoav Gallico) and a male receiver (his son-in-law Elia). But if Gallico is the giver, why is the verb “[he] gave” followed by “the honored Mistress Rosa” without the article “to” (in this case it would be the prefix *le-*)? The word “to” (in the form of the particle *’el*) does appear further on in the text of the inscription, clearly indicating that the gift was given *to* the bridegroom, Elia. This confusing situation explains Narkiss’ rethinking of the inscription.

Another possibility:

They gave it [Natnu] as a gift... Mistress Rosa (and her father?) to... his (her father’s) son-in-law Elia.

This reading implies more than one giver, possibly Mistress Rosa and her father. But if this is the case, why does only Mistress Rosa’s name follow that verb, R. Yoav Gallico being mentioned only afterward as her father and Elia’s father-in-law? Was this property of father and daughter held in common, or held in trust by the father for his daughter?

The best grammatical possibility seems to be this:

It was given [*Netano* (or possibly *Netanto*)]
as a gift [by] . . . Mistress Rosa to . . . (her father's) son-in-law Elia.

This implies that Mistress Rosa is the one who “gave it” (that is, the book) to “his [that is, her father's] son-in-law”; that is, her new husband. While this works slightly better with the syntax of the line, inconsistency still exists. The verb should have been either *natna*, meaning “she gave,” or *netanto*, meaning “she gave it.” But it may be that the writer of the inscription—testifying in his or her own way to the specialness of this case—applied the male gender form to Mistress Rosa, the feminine grammatical subject of the phrase and owner of the book. Even if this is the case, a further difficulty appends: Why would the inscription refer to Elia b. Menaḥem Rava as Rosa's father's son-in-law, rather than as her husband? This may be a locution of extreme euphemism and politesse, or perhaps it reflects on the occasion of the giving: maybe the book was given after the couple's engagement but before the actual marriage, in which case the bridegroom would have been under obligation to the bride's father as a son-in-law (via the engagement contract), but technically not yet to the bride as husband (via the marriage contract). This language would then serve the dual purpose of being legally precise and shielding the couple from the evil eye by not representing the marriage as a *fait accompli* at a moment when it was not yet so.¹⁰

Should it make a difference if this haggadah was given as a gift by the bride to her bridegroom, or if it was given to the newlyweds by the bride's father? Very little is known about the patronage and ownership of medieval Jewish manuscripts. There is, likewise, a paucity of documentary evidence concerning the relationship of early modern Jewish women to books as movable property. Needless to say, to the social historian, the difference between a father giving an exquisite manuscript to his new son-in-law and a bride giving such a manuscript as a gift to her bridegroom is striking and important in terms of how the ownership of movable property by Jewish women in early seventeenth-century Italy is understood. But the difference is equally crucial to the art historian attempting to piece together the provenance of the Golden Haggadah.

Perhaps the manuscript was illuminated for a woman. Would it be too farfetched to imagine that it was commissioned by or for one of Rosa Gallico's ancestors and passed down from mother to daughter until the Gallico-Rava wedding, when the circumstance of its being given as a gift to a man—effectively passed into the male line of the family—was exceptional enough to occasion the addition of a title page? Although there is absolutely no documentary evidence for this, it is indisputable that illuminated manuscripts were owned by Jewish women, and that the rationale for illustrating such books, haggadot among them, was often to encourage the interest and involvement of women

and children in the proceedings of the seder. Women often figure prominently in the illustrations of such books. The blessing tendered the bride in the acronym on the title page, “May she be blessed among the women of the tent,” is a reference to Yael the Kenite, who vanquished Sisera (Judges 5:24) but is associated in rabbinic literature with the matriarchs.¹¹ The reference may point to a consciousness on the part of the inscription’s composer of the appropriateness of this book as a gift from a woman, certainly in light of the many women depicted within it, but perhaps even in the cognizance that she is the last link in a long line of female owners of the manuscript.

That the Golden Haggadah is unusually rich in representations of women, and that it was once the property of a woman, are undeniable. To extrapolate from these facts that the manuscript’s original patron was a woman and that it was passed down in the family by its female members might seem tendentious, making too much of the late dedication inscription and overstating the implications of the preponderance of women in the iconography. Nonetheless, it is also true that the previous lack of clarity regarding the dedication inscription and the failure to acknowledge the prominence of the depictions of women in this manuscript has made too little of the relationship between its potential provenance and its iconography. Because, in my opinion, too little attention has likewise been paid to the images of women in the Golden Haggadah, I feel moved to take some license to speculate here in order to redress this egregious oversight of such a central stratum of the iconography. I propose what follows with full awareness of its totally conjectural nature, and with the cognizance that it is based solely on internal evidence of the iconography.

SCENES OF LOSS, SALVIFIC SUFFERING, AND RESTORATION

There is a thematic strand in the Golden Haggadah that emphasizes the connection of women with rescue or salvation. In some cases, women are saved from suffering or death: Noah’s wife and daughters from the flood, for instance, or Jethro’s daughters from the depredations of the shepherds. But the most powerful scene in this regard is the one in which Jacob sends Leah and (more prominently) Rachel across the Jabbok, returning to the other side to wrestle the angel (plate 30, top right). The angel, of course, is the “angel of Esau,” and Jacob’s escape from the encounter with his life foreshadows the fact that he will not be killed, as he feared, by Esau. Accordingly, this scene speaks to the salvation from and triumph over death, with a particular emphasis on the figure of Rachel.¹²

Second, among the “necessary,” “corroborative,” and “incidental” depictions of women in the Golden Haggadah that I have been discussing, there are a significant number that place visual emphasis on women with children. Among these are various iconographic references to the loss of children. I believe that these images become signifiers reaching beyond the biblical narratives and the texts from the haggadah in which they

appear, possibly pointing to a discrete authorial context and to particular circumstances surrounding the commission of the manuscript.¹³

The first of these figures in terms of the order of the biblical narrative and the sequence of illustrations is the female figure who is included in the scene of Jacob's rending his clothes on receipt of Joseph's ripped and bloodied garment (see fig. 54; plate 31, bottom right). The appearance of this dramatically mourning female figure is problematic in two ways: the biblical text specifically describes the scene in which Jacob's sons bring him Joseph's violated tunic as being played out by an "all-male" cast: "They [the brothers] had the ornamented tunic taken to their father, and they said, 'We found this. Please examine it; is it your son's tunic or not?' He recognized it, and said, 'My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph was torn by a beast!' Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning for his son many days" (Genesis 37:32–34). On the occasion depicted in the illumination—the instance when the tunic is brought before Jacob and he rends his garment—no women are present. The following verses depict the formal mourning and bewailing of Joseph, where the narrative does, in fact, include women. But that passage depicts multiple women, and in it there is no mention of anyone actually mourning but Jacob himself: "All his sons and daughters sought to comfort him"—that is, they were engaged in comforting him, which would require that they were not mourning or weeping themselves—"but he refused to be comforted, saying, 'No, I will go down mourning to my son in Sheol.'" The text concludes by emphasizing, "Thus his father" (and neither Joseph's brothers, nor his sister, nor his sisters-in-law) "bewailed him" (Genesis 37:35).¹⁴

The woman depicted here is unparalleled in Jewish illumination. Katrin Kogman-Appel describes this detail as being "of probable midrashic background"¹⁵ and has pointed to parallel images in late antique depictions of this scene: a similar woman appears behind Jacob in an ivory relief on Maximian's Cathedra at Ravenna and a later mosaic in San Marco.¹⁶ But she notes that neither of the scenes in which they appear resembles the one in the Golden Haggadah. Though the exact chain of transmission of this motif is unclear, it eventually appears in a Joseph cycle carved in the early thirteenth century on a marble panel now housed in Santa Restituta in Naples, which evinces "high degrees of formal congruence combined with iconographic correspondence [with some of the Joseph illustrations in the Golden Haggadah] despite the distance in date and location and the resulting stylistic differences." Kogman-Appel ascribes the similarity to the possibility that the authorship of each work drew upon a "common pool of motifs" and offers a variety of possible intermediary steps in the transmission, all of which she regards as plausible but not definite. She ultimately asserts that she is concerned with the "cultural history" of these cycles: "What matters in this respect is not a definition of any pictorial tradition(s) the Jewish cycles might follow, but an elucidation of the stage on

which these artistic borrowings were performed and of their dynamics in the late medieval Spanish kingdoms.” She concludes that the “‘iconographic history’ of the Golden Haggadah is a history of the choice of motifs rather than that of any particular model.”¹⁷

I, too, am interested in the cultural history of the iconographic motifs present in the Golden Haggadah. I have been attempting to demonstrate that the authorship of the Golden Haggadah was aware of the valence of each iconographic element it included in its “exegesis,” as well as deeply conscious of the meaning of every image from the “common pool of motifs” that it adopted to this new, Jewish context. It is highly unlikely that such an obviously knowledgeable and involved authorship would have included this extratextual, even countertextual figure without justification. Short of conjecturing a general “midrashic background” for the motif, it is impossible to determine precisely who this woman represented for the late antique and early medieval Christians who incorporated her image. In the original context, it may have been that she represented Leah, Jacob’s surviving wife, or Bilhah, his concubine, or Dina, his daughter. But it is equally possible that she might have been a personification of “Mourning,” similar to other allegorical figures and personifications in classical, Hellenistic, late antique, and early Christian visual culture.¹⁸

Thus, while the origin of this motif and the channels through which it might have come to the attention of the authorship of the Golden Haggadah are now considerably clearer, the reasons for the particular choices of the Golden Haggadah’s authorship remain a mystery. To begin with, they presumably chose the iconographic scheme represented in the Santa Restituta panel from among a number available to them in an intermediary source. But they did not copy the entirety of that cycle, and they did not adhere to all its details. Why did the authorship of the Golden Haggadah find the image of a mourning woman behind Jacob so compelling and appropriate for its program that it deliberately introduced her into a scene in which—according to scripture—she should not appear? How did the authorship construe the identity of this woman when it chose this image? Who did it think she was, regardless of the original context and intent of the image?¹⁹

Obviously, it is impossible to say. She might be Leah or Dina or Serah, daughter of Asher. But why would the authorship include any of these women, who are mentioned neither in the text nor in the midrashim as being present at this particular moment? Moreover, when women (the daughters of Jacob) do appear at a later juncture they are depicted not as mourning but, on the contrary, as coming to comfort Jacob. This woman might be Bilhah, since a single source claims that she had raised Joseph after Rachel’s death. But no text asserts that she was present at this juncture in the narrative.

The inclusion of a distinctly “unnecessary” woman in the very limited space of the frame, and the prominence and pathos of her mourning, may indicate that she is a

figuration of the grief of a particular character, and an even more central and important one than Leah, Dina, Serah, or Bilhah. She may represent Rachel. Indeed, in dress and appearance (her pink cloak, her loose kerchief) she correlates with the figure I identified as Rachel in the scene of the fording of the Jabbok. And while there is no literary or iconographic precedent for Leah, Bilhah, or Dina weeping over the report that Joseph has been torn by a wild beast, the oft-evoked topos of Rachel as a mother grieving over her lost children may be what is being invoked here. Jeremiah 31:15 offers these famous words of comfort: “Thus said the LORD: A cry is heard in Ramah—wailing, bitter weeping—Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted. For her children, who are gone.”

RESURRECTING RACHEL

There is only one problem, of course: Rachel died in childbirth with Benjamin. She is dead and, in fact, long buried by the time the brothers bring back their report of Joseph’s death. Yet, remarkably, in this image she is brought back to life, so to speak, by the authorship. This occurs in order to increase the pathos of this scene, but also, as I will argue, for reasons connected to the context of the creation of the manuscript. The authorship has good precedent: the revival of Rachel here parallels Joseph’s own “resurrection” of his mother in recounting his dream of the sun and moon and stars bowing down to him. In that dream, the moon represents the long-dead Rachel as adoring Joseph. This incongruity does not elude Jacob. In attempting to minimize the dream and to assuage the jealousy of Joseph’s brothers, it is this element of the dream upon which Jacob seizes when he asks incredulously, “Are we to come, I *and your mother* and your brothers, and bow low to you to the ground? And will *your mother* and I bow down to you?” In other words (my emphasis follows Rashi), “Are we really to believe that your mother—who is dead—will come and venerate you? The whole dream must be nonsense!”²⁰

The clues that corroborate that this female image may very well be a personification of the grief of Rachel from beyond the grave are actually to be found in the Jeremiah verse and its relationship to the iconography. First, that verse is explicitly linked to the narrative in Genesis that identical language is used concerning Jacob in Genesis 37:35 (*yema’en le-hitinahem*, he refuses to be comforted) and Rachel in Jeremiah 31:15 (*me’annah le-hinahem*). This solidifies the connection: neither Leah nor Bilhah nor Dina’s grief is mentioned at all in the text. Through the use of identical language, Jeremiah makes present Rachel’s refusal to be comforted just as Jacob himself refuses to be comforted.

Second, regarding Rachel’s being “brought back” from the other world in order to bemoan Joseph: The *pshat*, or contextual meaning of “Ramah” is that it is a place—a town in Benjamin listed between Giv’on and Be’erot (Joshua 18:25) The word *ramah* also means a height, and *be-ramah* can mean “on a height” or, more commonly, “on

high.” In fact, more often than “*kol be-ramah nishmah*” has been read contextually as “A cry is heard in Ramah,” it has been read midrashically as “A voice is heard on high,” indicating that Rachel is grieving in the supernal Garden of Eden—in Paradise, in other words—after her death. So the Jeremiah verse, read through the lens of this iconography, might be understood reflexively here, depicting her as refusing to be comforted for her son, even in death.²¹

If this weeping woman is in fact intended to be a figuration of the grief of Rachel from beyond the grave, there is a certain ambiguity present; Rachel’s grief is traditionally viewed through the lens of the verse from Jeremiah quoted above. It is a grief that is also the voice of advocacy, a motherly grief so powerful that it becomes theurgical. Rachel’s weeping is imagined to move God—even in God’s moments of most resolute anger—to mercy. The conclusion of Jeremiah’s prophecy, after all, reads, “Thus said the LORD: Restrain your voice from weeping, Your eyes from shedding tears; For there is a reward for your labor—declares the LORD: They shall return from the enemy’s land. And there is hope for your future—declares the LORD: Your children shall return to their country” (Jeremiah 31:16–17). In other words, the very tears that Rachel sheds over her lost children are what moves God to effect their liberation. Through Rachel’s righteousness (she is placed in direct chiasmic parallel on the page to the fallen seductress Potiphar’s wife, plate 31, bottom left), and particularly through her intervention as a suffering mother, Rachel’s children are redeemed. So the image of the weeping Rachel serves simultaneously as a figuration of loss and one of hope.

But even if the image does not represent Rachel, it is significant that the authorship has chosen from among the common pool of motifs one that adds a woman mourning the loss of a child. Indeed, the loss of children is a leitmotif of the Golden Haggadah. The illustrations from the Book of Exodus begin on folio 8v (see fig. 55; plate 33, bottom left) with another image of the loss of children: the episode of Pharaoh commanding the midwives to cast all male newborns into the Nile. Among the fourteenth-century Catalanian manuscripts, this iconography appears only in the Golden Haggadah and in the Sister Haggadah, which draws upon the iconography of the Golden Haggadah. There is, however, an ambiguity here as well. While the illustration does show babies being cast into the river by Pharaoh’s servants, the very presence of the midwives—who the viewers know will eventually save those children—causes the image again to hover between being evocative of tragedy and recalling redemption.

ANOTHER RACHEL

In the first scene of the Israelite bondage (plate 36, top right), a woman appears among the slaving Israelites. The inclusion of a woman in this depiction is highly unusual in comparison with those that appear in other medieval Spanish haggadot, which generally

show males slaves alone. In fact, the treatment of the scene in the Golden Haggadah is unique, because this woman holds a baby directly above a mold for making bricks (see fig. 56). In this, it seems intended to evoke a midrashic topos whose theme is the loss of children. Several midrashim relate how Rachel, the granddaughter (or daughter) of Shutelah of the tribe of Ephraim, although she was in the ninth month of her pregnancy, was forced to tread stubble into the clay alongside her husband. Tragically, as her heels were pierced by the coarse stubble and her blood flowed into the mortar, her exertions brought on labor, and when the infant emerged from its mother's womb it fell into the mixture in the brick-mold and was engulfed by it. At that moment the angel Michael descended, took that brick-mold, and brought it up before the throne of glory. That very night the decree of punishment against Egypt was issued. "And I passed over you and I beheld you wallowing in your blood, and I said to you, 'In your blood shall you live! In your blood shall you live!'" (Ezekiel 16:6). Here is yet another iconographically unique scene dramatically employed in the service of the theme of the loss of progeny, with a female protagonist whose name—perhaps not incidentally—is Rachel. And again it is through the suffering of this protagonist that God finally takes notice of the suffering of the slaves and is moved to action. Again, the germ of the salvation of the Israelites is present in the redemptive suffering of a woman who loses a child.²²

A MOURNING QUEEN AND AN EGYPTIAN PIETÀ

Unique also to the Golden Haggadah is the fact that the depiction of the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn is acted out exclusively by women (plate 39, top right). The double scene includes, at right, a woman witnessing the Angel of Death striking a man dead in his bed. But the more dramatic scene is at left, where a grieving handmaid has sunk to the floor, weeping as, Pietà-like, she holds a dead baby in her lap, while a crowned female figure on a slightly elevated plane laments as well (see fig. 60). This crowned figure seems intended to represent the queen of Egypt, who, in another boldly counterscriptural move, replaces Pharaoh in this scene, possibly as a personification of "Egypt." Here the authorship presents a woman-centered version of the slaying of the firstborn in place of a depiction of the death of the "first-born of Pharaoh, who sat on his throne," explicitly called for in the biblical text. I believe that the alteration of this scene to be played out by an "all-female cast" is intended to continue the theme of the loss of children, again emphasizing its particular impact on women and attempting to move the viewer with its pathos. The nexus of suffering/redemption is clear here; it requires no twist. Because of the suffering of the Egyptian women in this horrific, final plague, the Israelites are redeemed. Of course the context of Judaism as a medieval minority culture in dialogue with the iconographic topoi of the Christian majority lends a further level of complexity in the elucidation of female suffering over loss of children that births (so to speak) redemption.

The doubled image of the mourning mother—handmaid and queen—evokes two central Marian metaphors. The figures are even both dressed in the expensive blue evocative of Mary in Christian iconography. And one can hardly avoid viewing the child who lies in the arms of the handmaid as a response to the image of the dead Jesus lying in the arms of Mary. This scene also makes a strong polemic point about chosenness and wickedness: it is through the death of the firstborn of the wicked Egyptians that the Israelites as God’s chosen people are redeemed from bondage. The viewer is confronted with the striking image of an Egyptian Pietà, wherein the dead Egyptian child, facing right, is at the head of an imaginary line that crosses into the next frame and devolves upon the living Israelite baby (dressed in an identical pink robe) leaving Egypt. This chiasmic parallel evokes sentiments similar to those found in the polemic use of the narrative of Solomon’s judgment in 1 Kings 3:22, with the famous contention of the mothers: “No, the live one is my son, and the dead one is yours!” . . . “No, the dead boy is yours; mine is the live one!” In *Zam’ah Nafshi*, his *reshut* to *Nishmat Kol Hai* for *Shemini ‘Azeret*, Abraham ‘Ibn ‘Ezra writes, “Perceive the woman of truth, the maidservant who declared: ‘No, yours is the dead child; mine lives.’”²³ In context, it refers to the narrative in 1 Kings 3, but in ‘Ibn ‘Ezra’s context (Islamic Spain in the era of the rise of the Almohads) it is transformed into an obvious polemic between Jews and non-Jews, which could then be easily adapted to the visual context of the Christian Spain in which the Golden Haggadah was written. Here the “woman of truth” is the Israelite mother with the baby leading the Exodus; the “other woman” is the Egyptian handmaid with the dead child. In its Christian context the image effects a double polemic turn. First, it proclaims that the death of Jesus is not the only salvific death: God punishes the wicked as part of the salvation of the righteous, so that even the death of criminals can have “salvific” power. And with equal stridency, it proclaims that a live Israelite (Jew) is worth more than a dead Egyptian (Christian).

IMAGES OF COMFORT AND RESTORATION

By way of contrast to these dramatic scenes of the loss and death of children, there are images of comfort in the iconography of the Golden Haggadah. The initial reference to this theme is the strong emphasis on Sarah’s preternatural fertility (see fig. 49; plate 28, bottom left). But the theme comes into its own most powerfully and decisively in the final panels of the narrative sequence. It is four women who appear in the lead position in the scene of the Exodus, while Moses and the men lag behind (plate 39, top left). The men leave “with a high hand,” their right hands literally held high as their left hands clutch balls of *mazah* dough. Four women are present, two who appear full-figure in the foreground and two signified only by the tops of their covered heads behind the other two. The hands of the two visible women are otherwise occupied: one holds a double portion of *mazah* dough, either signifying her role as nurturer and provider or emphasizing her

cooperative relationship with the other woman—the very front figure, hence the “leader” of the Exodus—both of whose hands are devoted to carefully holding a baby (fig. 57).

Similarly, it is a woman holding a baby, followed closely by a man with a small child on his shoulders, who leads the crossing of the Sea of Reeds (fig. 58; plate 39, bottom left). Moses turns back to call the waters to close upon Pharaoh and his chariots. It is he alone who lingers to contemplate the scene of death and loss. By way of contrast, this couple faces forward, with their children, into the future—the continuity of the narrative, as it were, leaving loss and tragedy behind. Formally, but also conceptually, the figures of the Israelites crossing the Sea of Reeds echo those of Jacob’s family who ford the Jabbok, who make the transition from death to life.

Finally, on the last folio in the sequence, there is a display of hyperfertility (plate 40, top left). In a scene consciously constructed to echo (again, both formally and conceptually) the scene where Pharaoh commands the destruction of the Israelites and attempts to suppress their fertility, “the head of the household orders that *maṣah* [explicitly associated with salvation from destruction] and *ḥarosset* [explicitly associated with fertility] be distributed to the babies/children.”²⁴ Here the householder is shown seated, like Pharaoh, in a cathedra, and, like Pharaoh, extending a commanding hand. But unlike Pharaoh, his command serves not to destroy children and end Israelite religious continuity but to preserve them and to enable Jewish observance by distributing to needy Jews the ritual foods necessary for the seder. The recipient, in this case, is a woman who, in fact, has no fewer than seven children (fig. 59). She has six children of the same height and age, and in this her fertility mirrors that of the Israelite women in Egypt. *Midrash Tanḥum’a* understands the six adjectives used to describe the fertility of the Israelites in Exodus 1:7 to hint that each birth in Egypt consisted of six children. But she is also holding a baby, thus exceeding in fecundity even the hyperfertile Israelite women. She is the visual manifestation of the “barren woman [who] bears seven [children]” in Hannah’s praise of God for reversing the fortunes of the oppressed in I Samuel 2:5. The woman depicted here as “bearing seven” serves as a counterpoint to the “mother of many,” who is “forlorn” in I Samuel 2:5. The trajectory from mourning to joy in this verse finds an echo in the manuscript if one compares this depiction of the hyperfertile woman with the image directly opposite it on the other side of the bifolium—the illustration which it lies directly on top of when the haggadah is closed—that of the death of the firstborn (plate 39, top right). Here is the Egyptian queen, a possible personification of “Egypt,” the mother of many firstborn, in mourning; abject and forlorn.²⁵

In conclusion: the presence of so many women—necessary, corroborative, and incidental—in the Golden Haggadah certainly points to the possibility that this manuscript was made for a woman. The manuscript contains three scenes of the loss of children in which the pathos is heightened and emphasized by the use of extrabiblical and even

counterscriptural details. And the theme of the redemptive power of the suffering of the grieving mother who has lost a child is repeated throughout the work. Finally, there are three scenes in which women with children are prominently displayed, celebrated, even mythologized. Each of these configurations is so striking and unique to this manuscript that one cannot notice them without asking what might connect them all.

Perhaps—and I propose this even more tentatively, based solely on the internal evidence of the iconography as I read it—the manuscript was originally created for a woman who had suffered the loss of a child. It is in this context that the images of loss and recovery, and of death and redemption, as well as the centrality of themes relating to losing and producing children, make most sense.

FROM RACHEL TO ROSA

While I am speculating, perhaps I might even push the envelope a bit further: A character associated with the name Rachel appears three times in the manuscript: first, as the matriarch, prominent and central in the scene of fording the Jabbok, which represents the escape from death. Then, she (possibly) appears again, this time “resurrected” as a personification of grief to mourn her lost child. Of course Joseph is not really dead—he will ultimately save his whole family (not to mention all of Egypt) from death in the famine. Finally, there is the illustration of Rachel, (grand)daughter of Shutelah, who is about to lose her child. That nameless child’s death, brought to the attention of a hitherto unresponsive God, will set the entire apparatus of redemption into motion.

Perhaps this triple appearance of “Rachel” indicates that the original owner of the manuscript was called Rachel. Perhaps “Mistress Rosa” of the 1609 dedication leaf (who I above conjectured was the several-times-great-granddaughter of the original owner) was named after her, bearing the Hebrew name of Rachel, for which the Spanish “Rosa” was a traditional alliterative equivalent. That would have made the transmission of the volume from Rosa to her bridegroom (and consequently out of the female line of the Gallico family) especially poignant, and may have moved the family (or Rosa herself) to commission the special title page for that occasion.

The images of the redemptive suffering of women mourning for lost children, as well as those of women and children leading the Exodus, and the final image of preternatural fertility may thus have represented a sort of visual prayer on the part of those who commissioned the book for the use of its first owner—possibly a woman called Rachel—for recovery and reinvigoration after what may have been a profound and painful loss for her.²⁶

THE RYLANDS AND “BROTHER” HAGGADOT

Manchester, John Rylands Library,
MS Heb. 6, Catalonia, c. 1330–1340

London, British Library,
MS Or. 1404, Catalonia, c. 1330–1340

הבאנא ירך בהיסוד
 והנה ידו מצורעת
 השב ירך
 והנה שבה בבשרו

הבאנא ירך בהיסוד והנה ידו מצורעת השב ירך והנה שבה בבשרו



ויקח משה את מטהו וישלח את מטהו על ארץ מצרים ויהיו ארבעה נחשים וישלח משה את מטהו על הנחשים וישלח משה את מטהו על הנחשים וישלח משה את מטהו על הנחשים

מדין
 ויקח משה את מטה
 האלקים בידו
 ותקח צפרה ער
 סצרים



ויקח משה את מטהו וישלח את מטהו על ארץ מצרים ויהיו ארבעה נחשים וישלח משה את מטהו על הנחשים וישלח משה את מטהו על הנחשים וישלח משה את מטהו על הנחשים

PLATE 43 Rylands Haggadah, fol. 14r

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פרעה
כה אמר יש אלדו
ישלח את עמו
חרטמים

וישלח משה ואלההוה יתנוחח עמו וישלח את עמו חרטמים



למסד העבודה ונע יקישו להם תבן לבנים

תבנה העבודה
יבנה
יקישו להם תבן
לבנים

PLATE 45 Rylands Haggadah, fol. 15r



PLATE 44 BL Or. 1404, fol. 3r



PLATE 47 Rylands Haggadah, fol. 15v

ויבא משה ואהרן לפדעה וישבו כן כאשר צוה יי' וישלך אהרן את מטתו לפניו ויהי ענבו כהתנו



הנה וישא המימה ונעבת לקראתו על שפת הים וירם במטה: ויהגם כל המים אשר בים לדם

PLATE 46 BL Or. 1404, fol. 3v

16

7574

פרעה חרטמים
ותעל הצפרדע
יתכס את ארץ מצרים

פרעה חרטמים ותעל הצפרדע ויתכס את ארץ מצרים



ויתכס את ארץ מצרים ויתכס את ארץ מצרים

ויט אהרן את ידו במטהו
ויך את צפרדעו
ותהי הפנם



ויתכס את ארץ מצרים ויתכס את ארץ מצרים

PLATE 49 Rylands Haggadah, fol. 16r

ויש אהרן את ידו על מצוי מצרים ותקל הצפרדע ויחכס את ארץ מצרים: ויקרא פרעה למשקף העמור



ויש אהרן את ידו במצוה ידך את עפר הארץ ותהי חכנס בארס וכבהמה כל עליו הארץ



ערכב ביה פרוקובית גאון ושמה פרוקובין ז"ל עפרים

ערכב כבוד ביתה פרוקוב
ובית עפרים

ושמתי פרות בין עממי
בין עפרים - נשן



כמוסים בהם פרוקובים בנקרובינאן רכרובינאן

בסוליס בחזורים
בנמלים במקר
ובצאן דבם כבוד מה



ויעל הארבה על כל ארץ מצרים בכל נבול מצרים :

ויעל הארבה על
כל ארץ מצרים וינח
בכל נבול מצרים



ויהי חשך אפלה ולכל בני ישראל ויהי אור במושבותם

ויהי חשך אפלה
ולכל בני ישראל
היה אור במושבותם



PLATE 55 Rylands Haggadah, fol. 17v

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ותהי צעקה גדולה
במצרים צאן בית
אשר אין ישם מות



יש נתן את חן העב
בעיני מצרים וישלום
וינצלו את מצרים

PLATE 57 Rylands Haggadah, fol. 18r



PLATE 56 BL Or. 1404, fol. 6r

34

וְכַסֵּי צְרוּרֵי אֲמִלֹתָיִם וְהַשִּׁיבֵנו יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

לְעַמְּסֵי צְרוּרֹת
בְּשִׁמְלוֹת עַל שִׁכְמֵי
וְחַמְשִׁים צִלוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל



וַיֹּאכֵל אֶת רֶכְשֵׁי אֶתְרוֹ עַד לִקַּח עִמּוֹ

וַיֹּאכֵל אֶת רֶכְשֵׁי אֶתְרוֹ
עַד לִקַּח עִמּוֹ



PLATE 59 Rylands Haggadah, fol. 18v

והוא יתקן את המצודה ויבנה את המגדל ויבנה את המצודה ויבנה את המגדל



והוא יתקן את המצודה ויבנה את המגדל ויבנה את המצודה ויבנה את המגדל

PLATE 58 BL Or. 1404, fol. 6v

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ויעברו את הים
ביתוך הים
ובני ישראל הלכו
ביבשה בתוך הים

ויעברו את המצרים כתיך הים: ובעי ישראל הלכו ביבשה בתוך הים



PLATE 61 Rylands Haggadah, fol. 19r

... ..



PLATE 60 BL Or. 1404, fol. 7r



Siblings

Identical or Fraternal?

ALTHOUGH “TWINS” FROM THE same workshop or a particular master are fairly common among medieval manuscripts, the relative dearth of Jewish illuminated manuscripts makes it rare to encounter a pair so closely allied as the so-called Rylands Haggadah (Manchester, John Rylands University Library, MS Heb. 6) and the haggadah described as its “Brother” (London, British Library, MS BL Or. 1404). Both originated in Catalonia between 1330 and 1340. Most of the focus of early research was on the imaginative reconstruction of a lost model for both works, but Raphael Loewe has cogently argued that BL Or. 1404 came first based on the corruption of the liturgical texts in the Rylands Haggadah. This theory is corroborated by Katrin Kogman-Appel’s convincing demonstration that the iconography of BL Or. 1404 seems to have been the model for that of the Rylands Haggadah.

The stylistic dissimilarities between these manuscripts are many and obvious: BL Or. 1404 incorporates Byzantinizing elements, particularly in the modeling of faces and hands, with dark olive-green shading and white to pink highlights. The Rylands Haggadah is more like contemporary Spanish Latin examples of the illuminator’s art, with round soft figures sporting exaggerated gestures and facial expressions, and occasional, somewhat archaizing French elements. Scholars have acknowledged the obvious variation in style between the two manuscripts but have consistently emphasized the similarity of their iconography. The ways in which presentations of the same scenes deviate from each other in the two works have been categorized as “minute” and ascribed to essentially negligible variations in the interpretation of their putative common model by a copyist.¹

There is indeed a superficial similarity between the iconography of the manuscripts. But the description of the two manuscripts as “nearly identical” immediately attracts my attention to the interstice between the words “nearly” and “identical,” drawing me to deeper consideration of the allegedly inconsequential differences between the two “siblings.” The evidence that BL Or. 1404 was the original manuscript frees me to consider how the authorship of the Rylands Haggadah transformed the iconography of its model, allowing me to weigh more precisely how these two haggadot are similar and how they differ. I can, therefore, evaluate how each manuscript presents *sippur yezi’at Mizrayim* iconographically, and how this accords with or differs from the various treatments of that metanarrative I have presented thus far.

FIGURE 63 OPPOSITE, TOP
Death of the firstborn. BL Or. 1404,
fol. 6r (detail)

FIGURE 64 OPPOSITE, BOTTOM
Death of the firstborn. Rylands
Haggadah, fol. 18r (detail)

FIDELITY AND LITERALISM

Let me begin with some observations about the way both works are configured on the most basic level. Katrin Kogman-Appel describes the Rylands Haggadah and BL Or. 1404 as hewing “much more literally to the Bible and involv[ing] midrashic exegesis to a lesser extent” than, for instance, the Golden Haggadah. She concludes from this that the patrons “probably employed artists without bothering with further scholarly intervention, and the results were cycles that are less indebted to exegesis and other scholarly matters,” because those who commissioned them “seem to have been less involved and concerned about a particular message, simply wanting an embellished haggadah with an image cycle.”

It is true that the illuminations in these two works are much more concerned with fidelity to the scriptural text or with explicitly illustrating midrash than either the Birds’ Head Haggadah or the Golden Haggadah. But one needs to consider whether this desire for fidelity necessarily betokens literalism, and whether such literalism indicates a dearth of patron involvement and the lack of ideological direction. I accept Kogman-Appel’s premise that rabbinic advisers may not have been involved in the creation of these two manuscripts, leading to the illustration of fewer particular midrashic motifs in them. But this does not necessarily leave the manuscripts devoid of exegesis and preclude the possibility of their transmitting “particular messages.” On the contrary, rather than indicating a lack of involvement on the part of the patrons, such a situation could have presented the authorship with an opportunity to take more direct conceptual initiatives concerning the tenor of the works, unencumbered by the layers of theological, philosophical, and historiosophical issues that might have concerned them had their conceptualization of the manuscript been subject to greater rabbinic involvement. This would, theoretically, allow the present-day researcher access to certain aspects of the “particular message” of the authorship more directly as their own priorities and preoccupations came into sharper focus.²

In the context of manuscripts created with less scholarly involvement, the question of literalism becomes a vexed one. Is literalism the default position for “simple” patrons and artists faced with a dearth of learned guidance? I have contended that there is no such thing as truly literal illustration in medieval Jewish visual culture, so what am I to make of the careful consideration the authorship of these two manuscripts gave to making the iconography accurate *vis-à-vis* the scriptural text?

It is easy to see what might persuade one to consider the representation of scriptural narrative in both BL Or. 1404 and the Rylands Haggadah to be “literal.” The extreme level of attention paid to the biblical text is nowhere clearer than in BL Or. 1404 folio 4v (plate 50, bottom). This is a depiction of Exodus 9:3–4, a plague striking “horses and donkeys and camels . . . cattle and sheep and goats.” Here, as if the artist had ticked them

off of a checklist, are a donkey, identifiable by its large ears; a camel, with a beard, an arched neck, and a notched nose; and a horse, facing a cow or bull. At the top of the scene there is a group of sheep and goats. But the paint on this group is flaking, revealing the underdrawing of a cow. This palimpsest is concrete evidence of the remarkable level of meticulous attention paid by the authorship to assuring the conformity of the illuminations with the scriptural text. The preparator sketched in the image of a cow but, when it came time to fill the scene in with color, the illuminator changed the subject of this part of the illustration to a depiction of a group of sheep and goats, as if someone had pointed out that there already was a cow but that the sheep and goats specified in the biblical text were missing. The revised, final illustration thus closely conforms to the biblical text.

Certainly, concern for textual fidelity is manifest here, but all is not as “literal” as it seems, and the iconography of these haggadot drifts in and out of scriptural accuracy as it suits the respective authorships. Each of the two manuscripts, in fact, manifests a distinct and subtly different attitude toward literalism. A good test case for the differing approach of each authorship is the manner in which the idea of the collectivity of the Israelites is presented in each of the haggadot.

CROWD CONTROL: NUMBER AND GENDER

Both haggadot evince variations in the numbers and gender of figures in the “crowd” scenes (the Egyptian slavery, the looting of Egypt, the armed Exodus, and the crossing of the Sea of Reeds) that have not been remarked upon by previous researchers. For instance, the figures in the depiction of the Israelite bondage in BL Or. 1404 have been described as being disposed in a manner “on the whole . . . similar to those in the Rylands Haggadah.”³ Yet, whereas in the version of the scene in BL Or. 1404, twelve male Israelites of various ages are depicted laboring, in the allegedly “similar” illumination, the Rylands Haggadah folio 15r, there are only ten (plates 44 and 45, bottom). Similarly, the depiction of the armed Exodus in BL Or. 1404 features twelve Israelites including Moses and Aaron, in contrast to the one in the Rylands Haggadah, which shows fifteen Israelites including Moses and Aaron (plates 58, top; 59, top).⁴

As in the case of the Golden Haggadah, the sex of the characters depicted has warranted little comment. Yet, here, too, there is a contrast. Women figure prominently in the BL Or. 1404 in the scenes of the looting of Egypt (plate 56, bottom) and of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds (plate 60), whereas they are notably absent in the corresponding scenes in the Rylands Haggadah (plates 57, top; 61).⁵

What is one to make of the differences in number and gender in the crowd scenes in each of the two manuscripts? It is possible that the number or gender of figures in a given scene was primarily the result of space considerations and the whim of the illuminator. On the other hand, judging from medieval handbooks and from the testimony of

modern illuminators, thought needed to be put into the planning of every figure to be painted by the illuminator, and equal attention had to be paid to all: major characters and minor characters, central and supporting characters, figures in the foreground and in the background, even figures partially obscured by other figures. Though one may describe them simply as Israelites or Egyptians, the illumination of the image of each member of the “supporting cast” in the iconography of a given manuscript took as much time to plan, position, and execute as did the “central characters”: Moses, Aaron, and Pharaoh. The artist needed to carefully consider the sex and age of the members of this supporting cast, as well as their clothing, attributes, expressions, and gestures.

So although they may be arbitrary, it is more likely—given what is known about how manuscripts were made—that the variations in age, sex, and number of characters are evidence of premeditation on the part of the planners of BL Or. 1404. As I will demonstrate, the authorship of this work distinguishes itself from that of the Rylands Haggadah in overlaying a concern for scriptural fidelity with a tendency to understand certain ideas iconically or symbolically. In this case, it seemed important to the BL Or. 1404 authorship that the collectivity of the Children of Israel number twelve or some multiple thereof, and that women be included in most depictions of that collectivity, particularly at the narrative junctures of the looting of Egypt and of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds. For the authorship of the Rylands Haggadah, however, these considerations seem to have been less important, whereas other issues appear to have merited greater emphasis. What, specifically, are the differences, and to what agendas may they point in the respective manuscripts?⁶

I can make no conclusive statements about the images of women in BL Or. 1404 because scholars remain utterly ignorant of the manuscript’s patronage configuration. The images of women might simply have been part of the authorship’s commission, motivated by no particular connection to any living women. Or they could represent an intentional effort to engage women in the conversation that any illuminated manuscript inevitably stimulates, and one that a haggadah is designed to provoke. This effort could have been made because the manuscript was commissioned by or for a female patron, or because it was intended as a gift for a woman. Or it may have occurred because the haggadah—though commissioned by or for a male patron—was meant to be used in a household where women were present and “part of the picture,” a circumstance the patron wished to see mirrored in the manuscript. But absent specific patronage information, all of these possibilities (and others) remain equally theoretical. As I proceed, I will argue that the inclusion of women in BL Or. 1404 at the particular junctures in which they appear is connected with the ideological message and emotional tenor of the manuscript. I will return to this idea shortly when I consider the ideology of the respective authorships.

Though the reasons for BL Or. 1404's inclusion of women remain obscure, one can attempt an analysis of the impetus behind its creators' insistence on the consistency of a particular numeration of the Israelites. There are two ways in which the scriptural passages in the first chapters of Exodus refer to the collectivity of the Israelites. The most generic (and, statistically speaking, generally negative) way of describing them is as *ha-'am* (the people). A much more intimate and evocative designation is *bnei Yisra'el* (literally, the sons of Israel), referring to the twelve sons of Jacob/Israel and, by extension, the twelve tribes and the entirety of the Israelites. This cognomen is redolent of history and genealogy, it implies a covenant and relationship with God, it whispers of chosenness.⁷

DIFFERING VISIONS OF COLLECTIVITY

BL Or. 1404's relatively consistent numeration of the collectivity of the Israelites as twelve or a multiple thereof reveals a distinct concern on the part of its authorship to represent the group as symbolic of *bnei Yisra'el*. For the authorship of BL Or. 1404, the laboring Israelites (plate 44, bottom) are certainly meant to represent enslaved Israelites engaged in the bondage described in the scriptural narrative relevant to this juncture of the haggadah text. But in presenting precisely twelve figures, BL Or. 1404 elevates the narrative stratum to add an iconic level, causing them also to symbolize the collectivity of *bnei Yisra'el* with all the intimate, covenantal implications thereof.

In this context, the taskmaster (*nogesh*, per Exodus 5:13) is important and reinforces my speculation concerning the significance of the numeration of the laboring figures. As the thirteenth figure he thus appears distinguished from, outside of, or beyond the collectivity of *bnei Yisra'el*. This contention is supported by medieval exegesis. The question of whether these *nogshim* were Jews or Egyptians is discussed by Rashi in Exodus 5:6, where he states that “the *nogshim* (*JPS*, taskmasters) were Egyptians, and the *shotrim* (*JPS*, foremen) were Jews. The *nogesh* was appointed over several *shotrim* and the *shoter* was in charge of pressing the workers.” Ibn 'Ezra is in agreement. By making twelve the quorum for representing *bnei Yisra'el* and representing the taskmaster as the thirteenth man, the illumination confirms the strand of medieval exegesis—from both Ashkenaz and Sepharad—that insists on the non-Jewish otherness of the taskmasters, an idea supported in the iconography by the monstrous size of this figure relative to that of the Israelites over whom he towers, threateningly.

In selecting captions for the illustrations, when the authorship of BL Or. 1404 had a choice between a verse that designated the Israelites as “the people” (*ha-'am*) and one that called them the Children of Israel (*bnei Yisra'el*), the decision was generally to use the latter, sometimes in addition to the former.⁸ But in the case of the illumination of the laboring Israelites, no such choice exists in the biblical text. Only one text exists for the particular episode depicted here, Exodus 5:12, which describes the revocation of

the straw and the increased pressure from the taskmasters. “Then the people (*ha-‘am*) scattered throughout the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. And the taskmasters pressed them.” Though the text refers to the Israelites as *ha-‘am*, the iconography of BL Or. 1404 makes the viewer read against the text by representing the number of the Israelites as exactly twelve. It amplifies (and to a certain extent challenges or contravenes) the particular verse of scripture quoted in the caption. The text caption uses *ha-‘am*, emphasizing the group’s lack of particular distinction—perhaps because they here represent the downtrodden, laboring masses. But the numeration in the illustration, implicitly designating the figures as *bnei Yisra’el*, is a reminder that even in their abjection, these are still the twelve tribes of Israel, descendants of the free and noble Hebrew patriarchs and matriarchs, and engaged in an ongoing covenantal relationship with God. There is nothing literal about this idea. It is midrashic and homiletic in tenor. And as an exegesis that emphasizes the essential unity and cohesive identity of the Israelites, it correlates seamlessly with the agenda generally represented in the recounting of *sippur yezi’at Mizrayim*.⁹

The authorship of the Rylands Haggadah, by way of contrast, while no less meticulous in its concern to accurately represent the scriptural narrative, is less focused on presenting the Israelites in a collectivity of twelve or a multiple thereof. Privileging the narrative over the symbolic, the authorship found no precise number of Israelites specified in the scriptural text. In its reading, scripture called only for “the people,” a generic group. The authorship accordingly refrains from configuring the laboring Israelites in any symbolically meaningful manner. Thus, only ten Israelites appear laboring (plate 45, bottom). They represent not *bnei Yisra’el*, with all the attendant implications of that term, but simply *ha-‘am*, a nonspecific crowd.¹⁰ Similarly, in the other scene depicting the collectivity of the Israelites, that of the looting of Egypt, where there was a choice between one verse in which they are designated as *bnei Yisra’el*, and another in which they are called *ha-‘am*, the caption in BL Or. 1404 forms the verse with *bnei Yisra’el*, whereas the caption in the Rylands Haggadah has only *ha-‘am*.¹¹

Thus, the manner in which the authorship of each haggadah seems to have understood the collectivity of the Israelites demonstrates that the concern of each for iconographic fidelity to the text does not narrow the scope of either nor does it preclude a variety of strategies of representation. The authorship of BL Or. 1404 configures the iconography in such a way that it remains accurate to scripture while simultaneously extending itself in a nonliteral, symbolic direction. The iconography is thus able to contribute homiletically to *sippur yezi’at Mizrayim*. The authorship of the Rylands Haggadah reacted to this symbolic homiletic turn by pulling back toward a more literal attention to the text of scripture. But its own agenda comes strongly to the fore in the realm of the mood it imposes on the narrative—a rather bloodthirsty, vengeful attitude with regard to

the Egyptians—which presents a striking contrast with the measured and even empathic ethos of BL Or. 1404. While the authorship of BL Or. 1404 displays a propensity to limit any potentially vengeful sentiments concerning the downfall of Egypt and the Egyptians in the iconography, that of the Rylands Haggadah demonstrates an inclination to amplify such potentially vengeful sentiments. So although the authorship of the Rylands Haggadah takes an approach apparently more literal than that of the authorship of BL Or. 1404, this moral/emotional homiletic intervention occasions an ultimate effect similar to BL Or. 1404’s symbolic homiletic turn. Both authorships move the iconography of their respective manuscripts out of the sphere of “literalism” and into the realm of *sippur yeziʿat Mizrayim*.

IDEOLOGY AND ETHOS: THE TENOR OF THE MANUSCRIPTS

These differences between the *ethoi* of the manuscripts can provide one with a glimpse into the ideology behind each work’s construction of *sippur yeziʿat Mizrayim*. I will begin by noting ideologically tinged differences between the overall presentation of themes of punishment and vengeance in the two versions of the plague iconography. I will then proceed to point to iconographic clues regarding the thorny and often contentious theological debate over the extent to which Pharaoh retained his free will in refusing to let the Israelites go. Ultimately, I will focus most closely on the interaction between Israelite and Egyptian characters in the depictions of the plague of the firstborn, the plunder of Egypt, the Exodus, and the crossing of the Sea of Reeds in each manuscript.

In general, when it comes to showing the downfall of Egypt, the Rylands Haggadah heaps on more of everything: more frogs, lice, wild beasts, and boils; more hideous grimacing on the part of the afflicted Egyptians; more suffering as their wounds are licked by their dogs (plate 53, top); and more mourning Egyptians during the slaying of their firstborn (plate 57, top). It shows the Israelites’ cattle saved both from the murrain (through divine intervention; plate 51, bottom) and from the hail (through heeding God’s warning to protect the cattle indoors; plate 53, bottom). It depicts the Israelites mocking the Egyptians during this plague, as well as when they are struck by the plague of wild beasts (plate 51, top) and as they sit in the darkness (plate 55, bottom); shows them heavily armed and bearing away looted vessels in the Exodus scene (plate 59, top); and shows them armed again as they cross the Sea of Reeds, pointing at the drowning Egyptians, who appear—grimacing in their death throes—in three bands across the folio (plate 61).

This intensity of vituperation contrasts sharply with the relative calmness of BL Or. 1404, which shows fewer frogs, lice, wild beasts, and boils and less grimacing. It omits the dogs licking the wounds of the Egyptians (plate 52, top), and it depicts the mourning of the Egyptians at the slaying of the firstborn in more symbolic and restrained ways (plate 56, top). While it illustrates the cattle of Goshen being saved from the hail as a result

of the Israelites' obedience to the divine command (plate 52, bottom), it refrains from boasting visually of their salvation from the plague of murrain, which the text clearly indicates was a result not of piety or precaution but of chosenness—betokening a general divine preference for the Israelites over the Egyptians (plate 50, bottom). When it shows a group of Israelite elders accompanying Moses and Aaron as they bring the plague of beasts upon Egypt, it does so because the text specifically states that God will differentiate between the Israelites and the Egyptians on the occasion of this plague (Exodus 8:18–19). Here (plate 50, top) only Moses and Aaron point at Pharaoh, and Aaron and an elder point toward heaven, but the authorship abstains from showing the Israelites mocking the Egyptians at this (or any other) juncture. This treatment stands in stark contrast to that of the same narrative in the Rylands Haggadah, where Moses triumphantly indicates the unaffected Israelites, one of whom points mockingly at the Egyptians (plate 51, top). BL Or. 1404 shows only Moses and Aaron bringing the plague of darkness onto Pharaoh, without flaunting the light-filled dwellings of the Israelites (plate 54, bottom). It shows the Israelites at the Exodus and at the Sea of Reeds less as an army than as a diverse group of individuals, only some of whom are armed (plates 58, top; 60). As noted, BL Or. 1404 includes women both in the scenes of the looting of Egypt (which is depicted as a rather solemn affair) and at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds. Although a couple of looted vessels appear in that illumination, it is they, rather than the drowning Egyptians, that seem to be the subject of some discursive gestures on the part of the Israelites and their leaders. There is no pointing in the direction of the drowning Egyptians, who appear in only two—as opposed to three—bands across the folio. They are devoid of the grimacing rictus of death shown on the faces of the drowned Egyptian figures in the Rylands Haggadah. Rather, all seem almost as if they are peacefully sleeping.

At first glance, the Rylands Haggadah's inclusion of the Israelites' salvation from the murrain (plate 51, bottom), the hail (plate 53, bottom), and the darkness (plate 55, bottom), its depiction of a heavily armed Exodus with the looted vessels (plate 59, top), and its illustration of their crossing the Sea of Reeds more like an organized army than a diverse band of escaping slaves (plate 61) seems to be “simple literalism.” After all, these narrative details are all found in scripture. But this attention to scripture is juxtaposed with other elements that are not explicit in the text: the multiplication and amplification of other scenes depicting Egyptian suffering and the frequent depictions of Israelites literally pointing out that suffering and mocking the Egyptians.¹²

BL Or. 1404, the model for the Rylands Haggadah, omits most of the instances of the salvation of the Israelites, downplays the suffering of the Egyptians, and presents not a single image of mocking Israelites. The intensification of vengeful images in the Rylands Haggadah and its stark contrast with the minimizing of such images in its model make it obvious that the Rylands Haggadah's “simple literalism” cloaks a sort of gloating

triumphalism. The authorship uses literalism to mask its aggression and to protest its innocence. It is as if—fearful of being charged with inciting its audience to feelings of vengefulness—the authorship of the Rylands Haggadah preemptively defended itself by asserting that it was merely being faithful to the text. Indeed, by this standard, the authorship of BL Or. 1404 might be deemed to be at fault for omitting vengeful or triumphal details that are plainly found in the scripture. In light of the model it had in BL Or. 1404, the Rylands Haggadah’s reversion to literalism in showing the salvation of the Israelites is not simple but polemic, born of a dialectic with BL Or. 1404, its model. It seems to me that this occurs because the authorship of the Rylands Haggadah seems to have regarded the iconography of BL Or. 1404 as too quietistic.¹³

THE SYMBOLIC VALENCE OF PHARAOH’S SWORD

While the authorship of BL Or. 1404 often “allows” Pharaoh a sword—an acknowledged symbol of power and authority, dignity and will—there is no depiction of Pharaoh indoors in the Rylands Haggadah in which he bears a weapon. This is in keeping with the general tone of the Rylands Haggadah: the tendency to disempower Pharaoh and the Egyptians and to rejoice in their downfall. In BL Or. 1404 Pharaoh is granted a sword in certain of the plague depictions, but as it does not appear consistently in all interior scenes, it seems plausible to posit some symbolic meaning for the sword in the scenes in which it does appear. Pharaoh appears bearing a sword in most of the plagues in which he is depicted as “hardening” his (own) heart or making his (own) heart “heavy.” He is categorically denied a sword in the final plagues, after each of which it is stated that “the LORD stiffened his heart.” The sword would, accordingly, seem to symbolize the self-destructive power of Pharaoh’s will.¹⁴

There are three exceptions to this convention, occasioned by formal and contextual considerations.¹⁵ But Pharaoh seems to have recovered his sword for no reason at all in the illumination of the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn, apparently violating the rule that denies him a sword when his agency is suspended and God hardens his heart (see fig. 63; plate 56). Looking closer at the scriptural account of this plague, however, one notes a lack of clarity regarding Pharaoh’s loss of agency. Although in God’s discussion with Moses prior to this plague, God threatens to harden Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 14:4), what actually happens in the narrative in Exodus 14:5 is that “Pharaoh and his courtiers [themselves] had a change of heart about the people.” Furthermore, when the telling of the tale of the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn is mandated for all future generations in the *sippur yezi’at Mizrayim* (Exodus 13:15), it is Pharaoh who is depicted as hardening his own heart. “When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD slew every first-born in the land of Egypt, the first-born of both man and beast.” By placing a sword in Pharaoh’s hand as it does in every other case in which he hardens his heart, the authorship

of BL Or. 1404 makes the explicit exegetical move of ascribing Pharaoh's stubbornness during this plague to his own agency and not to God's suspension of his free will. This is a beautifully clear case of iconography as exegesis—an instance of interpretation via visual culture as explicit as in any textual commentary.¹⁶

VICTIMS AND SURVIVOR/VICTIMS

The structure of the illuminations depicting the final plague, the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn, is dramatically different in each manuscript. The biblical text reads, "In the middle of the night the LORD struck down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle. And Pharaoh arose in the night, with all his courtiers and all the Egyptians—because there was a loud cry in Egypt; for there was no house where there was not someone dead" (Exodus 12:29–30). Narkiss, in his description of the scene in BL Or. 1404, notes laconically that the "composition . . . differs from that of the Rylands Haggadah." In fact, the differences are numerous and significant, and merit some attention (plates 56, top; 57, top; see figs. 63, 64).¹⁷

But even before I address the differences, the common elements of the composition prove fascinating in and of themselves. In both treatments of this scene, for instance, the "captive in the dungeon" is depicted as disheveled and unsavory, the only character in the entire iconography with a hair out of place—even among the ostensibly miserable, enslaved Israelites and the plague-beleaguered Egyptians. As in the Golden Haggadah, when the Israelites are sweating under their burdens, nothing whatsoever about their appearance marks them as a severely oppressed and dramatically underclass people. And even when Pharaoh and his councilors contort themselves to scratch their various itches, or when their festering sores are being licked by dogs, their appearance and stance is all elegance and poise. True, they become more flustered and disheveled than the consummately courtly figures in the Golden Haggadah, but only relatively: the depictions of Pharaoh and his courtiers in these manuscripts are very elegant, even when Pharaoh—his crown askew and looking like a shell of his former self—begs Moses to pray for him as the hail descends. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that just as in the Golden Haggadah no physical distinction is ever made between the appearance of Moses and Aaron and that of Pharaoh, or between the Israelites and the Egyptians more generally, that would reflect the moral corruption of the latter as compared to the virtue of the former.

While I have consistently resisted the idea that the differences in the iconography of these manuscripts are only "minute," in the case of the general preponderance of privileged figures as opposed to the lack of depictions of the disenfranchised, the two manuscripts are genuinely "rather similar." What was deemed so important about the single image of a physically unsavory character—that of the scruffy prisoner—that both

authorships felt compelled to include it in such a comparable fashion? Perhaps this was an opportunity for the authorships of both manuscripts to make a statement regarding the similarities and differences between Jews and Christians in their own society.

Neither manuscript makes any outwardly discernible distinction between “Egyptians”/contemporary Christians and “Israelites”/contemporary Jews, even though the former are the “masters” and the latter the “slaves” in the narrative, just as Christians were politically dominant and Jews subordinate in fourteenth-century Catalonia. But while the Christians were the masters on the political front, the Jews saw themselves as masters in their own context and on their own home ground. Though not legally the equals of Christians, Jews saw themselves at least as equivalent (and sometimes superior) to their “masters” in terms of class, breeding, lineage, comportment, and style. If both manuscripts agree about something, it is to confirm the self-perception of Jews as *melakhim bnei melakhim* (royals, the children of royals), heirs of the noble and free patriarchs and matriarchs, the equals or betters of their “masters,” regardless of their present political status.¹⁸

If, then, nearly all the figures—“Egyptians”/contemporary Christians and “Israelites”/contemporary Jews—in both these manuscripts are “masters,” the only case where a member of the “underclass” is actually represented is that of the captive in the dungeon. One can’t tell if his incarceration is a result of crimes against society or against the state, but it is obvious that he is a criminal. And this is what earns him his unpleasant physiognomy. In the *mentalités* of the authorship of these manuscripts, “Egyptians”/contemporary Christians, being—in spite of their wickedness—of a certain class, were to be depicted in a properly gracious and graceful manner. They could (and should, according to the narrative) suffer, but they were to do it elegantly. “Israelites”/contemporary Jews, as *melakhim bnei melakhim*, were their equals, and likewise, if the narrative required them to be enslaved, their toil was to be sanitized like that of the well-scrubbed peasants of the *Tres riches heures* of Jean De Berry or Watteau’s courtly “rustics.” The presence of the unkempt prisoner emphasizes that the distinctions between “Israelites”/contemporary Jews and “Egyptians”/contemporary Christians are not to be found in the realm of religion, class, socioeconomic status, or even morality. The only difference that applies here is the distinction between “masters” in one realm or another (“Israelites”/contemporary Jews and “Egyptians”/contemporary Christians as members of a single “upper class”) versus criminals and enemies of the state.

NARRATIVE AND STATIC/ICONIC AND DIALECTIC

We tend to think of narrative as moving forward through time. Yet iconography, as the representation of narrative, is often described as quite static: the straightforward depiction of the story “as told.”¹⁹ By way of contrast to a flowing narrative, something that

is “iconic” is evocative of fixity and immobility, a symbol standing in statically for the thing beyond it. But in reality, an iconic image, for all its static qualities, has the power to reach into the depths of human consciousness, and in this sense, is full of “movement.” Such is particularly evident when iconic images are employed in the service of narrative. Often the author of a narrative in which the trajectory is moving in a particular direction will introduce profound and meaningful iconic images into the story. The characters (although themselves fictional or constructed) will react, revealing themselves psychologically and causing the viewer to empathize with them. The iconic element causes these characters to “come alive” even though they are constructs to begin with and their psychology is the invention of the author.

A comparison between the iconography of the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn in these two manuscripts reveals a visual interpretation of narrative that ends up being quite static, and an “iconic” image that turns out to be quite dynamic in terms of the internal dialectic it foments. In the Rylands Haggadah (plate 57, top), Pharaoh is shown alone at right, sitting on his throne next to an architectural structure that has six “rooms” in two parallel rows of three. In each of the four nicely appointed upper rooms, two women mourn as a young man lies on a bed with a pillow and blanket. In the bottom left-hand room, a variety of beasts—horses, an ox, a camel, a donkey, sheep, and goats—lie dead, and in the bottom right-hand room a prisoner has died, still chained to the pillar of the dungeon where he is incarcerated. Pharaoh points with one hand toward the well-accommodated young figures in the upper level of the structure, while with the other he indicates the prisoner and the animals. Moses and Aaron stand at right, pointing at Pharaoh. Both Moses’ and one of Aaron’s hands encroach on the border of the architectural construction; Aaron’s other hand, palm open, gestures toward the sky.

There are also four dead men shown in the parallel scene in BL Or. 1404 folio 6r (plate 56, top), but unlike in the Rylands depiction, where they are all young, here there are (from top) a middle-aged man with a dark beard, an older man with a short grey beard, a yet older man with a long white beard, and a young beardless man. In the Rylands Haggadah the center of the page is dominated by the images of the dead, whereas in BL Or. 1404 the emphasis is on the living Egyptians. Here appear, from right, a single courtier, Pharaoh, another courtier, and “all of Egypt” (the survivors, of course), represented by a woman in the foreground wearing a pink cloak, and a man, barely visible, behind her. The dead prisoner is shown at bottom center. Moses and Aaron are “protected” within a two-story fortresslike structure at right, which is ornamented with a pot of lilies set out on the rooftop of a small enclosed porch directly below them. This structure represents Goshen, as it does previously in the manuscript (plate 50, top). Although the text asserts that Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, the illustration accords with the midrash that famously describes him as wandering the streets of Goshen, knocking at doors,

looking for Moses and Aaron, as Moses had promised that he would not see Pharaoh's face again until the day of his death (Exodus 10:28–29). Here, Moses and Aaron point to Pharaoh, as he clutches his sword with one hand and points to the middle-aged dead man with the other. The councilor to Pharaoh's right points to the lower register, at the prisoner and the animals; the councilor to his left raises one hand, palm up, to the sky as he points with the other to the eldest of the dead.²⁰

I will now compare the configuration of the figures as well as the use of space in the two versions, especially in the deployment of center and periphery to emphasize and deemphasize particular aspects of the scene. In the Rylands Haggadah version, the dead are at the center of the panel, whereas in BL Or. 1404, it is Pharaoh, his courtiers, “all of Egypt” (and, oddly enough, the dead prisoner) who are at the center of the page. On the right of the illumination, hitherto the domain of Pharaoh (and where he remains, as noted, in the Rylands illustration), he has been replaced by Moses and Aaron, signaling that they are now in control and that Pharaoh has become a survivor/victim.

Both the authorship of the Rylands Haggadah and that of BL Or. 1404 again pay close attention to the source text, but each, as usual, does so in its own way. The Rylands Haggadah is loyal to the text description of Pharaoh remaining within his home, to which he summons Moses and Aaron. Also in accordance with the text (“from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle”) the illumination depicts the complete extent of the plague by means of social distinctions, showing royalty and prisoners, humans and animals in different strata of the architectural framework. Pharaoh points to the upper stratum (the elites) with one hand; with the other he indicates the lower stratum (the prisoner and the full range of animals mentioned in Exodus 9:34). All this is quite firmly grounded in the biblical narrative with one exception: Pharaoh is alone and without the accompanying courtiers specified in Exodus 12:30.

In the version of this scene in BL Or. 1404, the visual differentiation of the relative chronological ages of the dead transforms this representation from a simple narrative depiction into an iconic treatment that goes beyond the narrative. The text, it will be recalled, depicts the ultimacy of the plague by showing its impact across the social spectrum (“from the first-born of Pharaoh . . . to the first-born of the captive”), not across the chronological range of ages (in which case it might have said something like “all the Egyptians—young and old”). Yet the depiction here seems meant to recall the “four ages of man,” a comprehensive catalogue of the stages of human life, emphasizing how none of them was spared by the plague.²¹

These figures, thus, represent an exegetical amplification of the biblical text. And like all plausible and engaging exegesis, this image provides material for psychological rumination, not simply on the part of the viewer but on the part of the other figures

depicted on the page. The scene becomes much richer in emotional content once one realizes that the authorship arranges the gestures of the characters of Pharaoh and his courtiers to indicate that they are aware of the iconic power of these figures, no longer generic “elite dead” (as in the Rylands Haggadah folio 18r), but representative of the four chronological stages of human existence.

A reading of the scene from left to right yields the following “dialogue” spoken in gestures: One councilor points to the dead prisoner and to the dead animals, demonstrating his concern for the legal and economic health of the country. Pharaoh glares at him, clutches his sword, and shows his teeth as he growls, “How dare you think about matters of state when ‘we are *all* dying?’ [Exodus 12:33]. Even people like us—there [he points at the middle-aged man, a man of roughly his own age] but for the grace of God go I! I am a firstborn myself! How do I know that I won’t be next? Moses promised me that the next time he saw my face would be the day of my death. Has Moses yet been wrong?!” The second councilor raises one hand in a questioning gesture as his other points to the eldest of the dead, a white-bearded man like himself. “With all due respect to your Majesty, even we—the oldest and most blameless—are dropping like flies. There is ‘no house where there is not someone dead!’”²² The tension here is palpable: one feels the torture of the survivors and the anxiety that stretches them to the breaking point, and while the viewer is not meant to overlook or to exonerate their behavior toward the Israelites, he or she can certainly sympathize with their anguish. This is a very powerful juncture in the iconography—in which the BL Or. 1404 authorship not only completely rejects *schadenfreude*, but, exceeding its accustomed generally nonvengeful stance, moves toward an almost empathic position.

REQUEST OR PLUNDER?

Hesitancy or comfort in rejoicing over the downfall of Egypt can be felt not only in the symbolic valence of certain elements of the composition, or even exclusively in the way the narrative is visually manifest, but even in the choice of text captions employed in the respective manuscripts. A revealing example is found in the parallel versions of the illumination depicting the Israelites taking vessels of silver and gold and garments from the Egyptians. The source text is Exodus 12:35–36: “The Israelites had done Moses’ bidding and borrowed from the Egyptians objects of silver and gold, and clothing. And the LORD had disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people, and they let them have their request; *va-yinazlu et mizrayim*—thus they stripped [or “plundered”] the Egyptians.” This text has an intratextual prehistory: God’s initial speech from the burning bush dramatizes for an insecure Moses the entire trajectory of his mission and its outcome in order to inspire him with confidence regarding the inevitability of his success. The climax of that encapsulated narrative reads: “And I will dispose the Egyptians

favorably toward this people, so that when you go, you will not go away empty-handed. Each woman shall borrow from her neighbor and the lodger in her house objects of silver and gold, and clothing, and you shall put these on your sons and daughters, thus stripping the Egyptians” (Exodus 3:22). God’s promise to Moses describes two stages of the “stripping” of the Egyptians. First, the Israelites—particularly the women—will interact with the Egyptians, asking to borrow from them certain luxurious possessions. God will then intervene to ensure that the Egyptians are kindly disposed to give the Israelites these articles. “Thus,” says the text (meaning “in this way,” in a congenial and neighborly manner not generally associated with looting), “stripping the Egyptians.” The act is designated as “stripping” or “plunder” because the polite requests of the Israelites will result in great material loss for the Egyptians, who will find themselves supernaturally disempowered to resist those neighborly requests. This scenario is yet another in a series of ways in which God toys with the free will of the Egyptians, teasing them as a cat plays with a mouse, in order to prove the omnipotence of God’s divinity. Only the creator of free will has the power to suspend it.²³

So, against the backdrop of Exodus 3:22, there are two prospective texts on which to “hang” a potential illumination of this scene: Exodus 12:35, which has the Israelites making the requests for the precious items from the Egyptians in an amiable way; and Exodus 12:36, which describes the actions of the Israelites as a “stripping” of Egypt—a “strong-arm” maneuver bending the will of the Egyptians to the will of God (per Deuteronomy 26:8). Tellingly, BL Or. 1404 folio 6r employs the “kinder, gentler” text of Exodus 12:35 for its caption, omitting the account of plundering, and emphasizing the Israelites’ obedience to Moses and their request: “The Israelites had done Moses’ bidding and borrowed from the Egyptians objects of silver and gold, and clothing.” This text consigns the motivation for the actions of the Israelites not to any greed or malice, but only to their desire to fulfill the command of Moses. It turns the whole scenario, by extension, into an expression of the people’s trust in God’s promise to Moses at the burning bush, demonstrating also that God, for his part, has been faithful to his covenant with Abraham, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years; but I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end they shall go free *with great wealth*” (Genesis 15:13–14).

The difference between the emphases of Exodus 12:35 and Exodus 12:36 is subtle. Exodus 12:35 focuses on trust in the divine promise: the Israelites are commanded to make what would, under normal circumstances, have seemed an outrageously extravagant request in a manner almost certain to be rejected. But they demonstrate their trust in the assurance of divine intervention transmitted by Moses, and through God’s ancient covenant with Abraham. Verse 35 is, moreover, a text that can and should be rendered in the past

tense, because it records an event that, by the time of its recounting, had already occurred (“The Israelites had done Moses’ bidding,” per *JPS* and other translations). This is the text that the BL Or. 1404 authorship chose as a caption for this scene (plate 56, bottom).

The authorship of the Rylands Haggadah, never shy about vengefulness, chooses Exodus 12:36 as the caption for this illustration: “thus, they stripped the Egyptians” (plate 57, bottom). This verse, by way of contrast with Exodus 12:35, highlights not human trust but divine power, showing the results of God’s intervention on behalf of the Israelites. It is an unsettling species of miracle—one that contravenes human nature, both in the revocation of the Egyptians’ free will and in the description of the Israelite “stripping.” Stripping, or plunder, is an implicitly violent, ostensibly powerful and empowering act. But here the power, in fact, is totally in the hands of God; there is no violence save for that done to the free will of the Egyptians. The Israelites enjoy a (perhaps unfair) supernatural advantage, reinforced by a bit of triumphalism. All these messages are transmitted by the Rylands authorship’s use of Exodus 12:26 here.

The iconographic treatments of the two versions of the scene resemble each other closely. Neither depicts violent plunder. While there is movement in both illuminations around the exchange of property from hand to hand, it occurs on a subdued scale. There is an economy of gesture, and the expressions of all the figures—both Israelites and Egyptians—are solemn and reflective, the scene unfolding as if in a dream. Even the version in the Rylands Haggadah (plate 57, bottom) seems restrained. There is no mocking or pointing here, as was the case in the plague scenes on folio 17. Only the child seems excited, a bit too eager compared with the solemnity of the others; it is as if all the older people understand the gravity of the moment. The gestures of the figures are limited to giving and receiving the goods.

In BL Or. 1404, even the child shows restraint, but the depiction includes a single seemingly “superfluous” gesture that turns out to be very much in place: an Israelite man, at center, lifts his hand beseechingly, and he is handed a golden vessel. The inclusion of this gesture and the presence of a woman in the BL Or. 1404 version is further testimony to its authorship’s close attention to the scriptural text. It reflects both Exodus 12:35 (“The Israelites had done Moses’ bidding and *borrowed* from the Egyptians objects of silver and gold, and clothing”) and God’s earlier promise to Moses at the burning bush, in Exodus 3:22 (“Each *woman* shall borrow from her neighbor . . . objects of . . . clothing”). Yet, as is generally the case in BL Or. 1404, this attention to the text does not preclude iconographic prefiguration or emotional content. A note of empathy is found in the illumination: the woman, at left, receives a pink garment as part of the booty, with a distinctly sorrowful look. As well she might: the garment is identical to that of the grieving Egyptian mother depicted facing her, directly above, in chiasmic opposition, in the representation of the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn. This mirroring may be a further

reflection of the manner in which potentially triumphalist sentiments—given free rein in the Rylands Haggadah—are tempered by expressions of sympathy in the iconography of BL Or. 1404.²⁴

CELEBRATING AND LIMITING MILITARISM

In the Exodus scene in BL Or. 1404 (plate 58, top) only a few Israelites are depicted with swords and armor and the text caption eschews any mention of an armed Exodus. It reads, “So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders” (Exodus 12:34). The second captioner has added, “The Children of Israel did as Moses instructed” (Exodus 12:35). Here, ten figures face Moses and Aaron, bringing the total number of Children of Israel (as the expanded caption refers to them) to twelve in the manner characteristic of this manuscript.

Only four of the figures wear helmets; two of these, in the foreground, also bear swords and shields. The bodies of the two helmeted figures at the rear of the composition are obscured by other bodies; hence, their weapons (if they were intended to have any) are not visible. This choice was deliberate; had the authorship requested it, the artist could certainly have “equipped” the helmeted figures in the back with visible and prominent pikes and spears as was done in the treatment of the scene in the Rylands Haggadah. One of the armed, helmeted figures in the foreground carries dough in a garment on his shoulder, another (with a swordless scabbard and without a helmet) has a similar packet or a kneading bowl.²⁵

Excluding Moses and Aaron, there are five completely unarmed, unhelmeted figures. Four—three of whom are white-haired elders—stand in the foreground. The fifth unarmed figure is at far right. He holds his kneading-trough or garment-covered dough with both hands on his back. The city of Raamses is unoccupied save for a single trumpeter sounding the alarm and pointing. And, as if to emphasize their role as prophetic elders rather than military generals, Moses and Aaron are depicted here with white beards, whereas their beards are brown or grey in every other instance in the manuscript. All of these factors—the small number of armed figures relative to the Rylands Haggadah and the interspersed many unarmed ones, the elderly figures of Moses and Aaron, as well as the deliberate choice not to crown the group with a hedge of swords and pikes—converge with the particular choice of wording in the caption to make the scene less a display of military prowess than of a people subject to divine command.²⁶

The parallel illustration in the Rylands Haggadah (plate 59, top) illustrates the same event in an entirely different modality. Here it is played out by what is literally a nation of warriors. The text caption explicitly emphasizes the military accoutrements, including the verse “the Children of Israel went up armed” (Exodus 13:18). Although the caption text refers to the Children of Israel, as opposed to the version in BL Or. 1404, where the Israelites number twelve, here the authorship evinces no attempt to employ any symbolic

numeration. Thirteen men face Moses and Aaron at left. Three wear helmets and bear spears; one is unhelmeted and carries a spear. One helmeted figure bears a pike. There are five other helmeted Israelites. Two, with swords, appear in the foreground, and the weapons of the others are not visible. One of the sword-bearing helmeted figures holds a looted chalice, the other carries dough wrapped in a cloak.²⁷

There are two further unhelmeted men in the foreground. One, with a sword, bears dough wrapped in a cloak, while the other, unarmed, stands at the forefront, bearing an empty kneading-trough on his shoulder. Thus, in this representation of the Exodus, only one of the thirteen Israelites is clearly unarmed, while at least eleven bear arms. The scene is visually dominated by armed and helmeted men, and it fairly bristles with armaments at the top. Following the progression from right, the illustration corresponds to the caption, which is written in the form of “labels”: the “city of Raamses” (where five Egyptians point at the departing Israelites), “the dough” (“wrapped in garments upon their shoulders,” per Exodus 12:35), and, finally, the fact most strongly emphasized in the illumination, namely, that “the Children of Israel went up armed” (Exodus 13:18).

EMPHASIS: DOWNFALL OF THE EGYPTIANS OR SALVATION OF THE ISRAELITES?

Just as the Rylands Haggadah folio 18v depicts all the Israelites at the Exodus save one (and Moses and Aaron, of course) as armed soldiers, in the following illumination, illustrating the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, every Israelite except one is equipped with a sword, spear, or helmet in some combination (plate 61). This is very much a military Exodus. In this, it departs once again—in the direction of militancy and vengeance—from its model, BL Or. 1404, which presents both scenes very differently (plates 58, top; 60). Though the Israelites are armed in the Exodus illustration in BL Or. 1404, only scabbards, not swords, are visible. And although in the illumination of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds in that manuscript some are armed (in some cases, with visible swords), the military presence is softened by the presentation of a more variegated crowd of Israelites, including, in those two illustrations, elders, women, and unarmed men.²⁸

Once again, in the scenes of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds in each manuscript, a judicious use of text captions reveals a contrast in the emphasis of each authorship. In the biblical account, the verse describing the overthrow of Pharaoh, his soldiers, and his chariots in the sea is “sandwiched” between descriptions of the Israelite salvation:

Exodus 14:21–22: The waters were split, and the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground.

Exodus 14:27: At daybreak the sea returned to its normal state, and the Egyptians fled at its approach. But the LORD hurled the Egyptians into the sea.

Exodus 14:29: But the Israelites had marched through the sea on dry ground.

Each of these verses has a distinctive theme. According to rabbinic and medieval commentaries, “the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground” (verse 22), which describes the *initial* splitting of the sea. In this verse, the Israelites, trusting “in the LORD and his servant Moses” (Exodus 14:31), plunge into the sea. Their trust is rewarded and the sea splits, becoming dry ground beneath their feet. The theme is trust.²⁹ “The LORD hurled the Egyptians into the sea” (verse 27) recounts the actual moment of ultimate punishment upon the Egyptians. The theme here is divine retribution. “But [while the Egyptians were drowning] the Israelites had marched through the sea on dry ground” (verse 29). In this passage (which *JPS* renders in past tense), the act is a *fait accompli*. While the sea is closing over the Egyptians behind them, the Israelites continue to pass through, experiencing the divine providence of walking on dry land as they witness God’s retribution. This passage describes not the faith but the triumph and revenge of the Israelites.

The caption for the depiction of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds in the Rylands begins with verse 27, “the LORD hurled the Egyptians into the sea,” with its theme of divine retribution, and only afterward quotes verse 29—“But the Israelites had marched through the sea on dry ground”—with its theme of triumph/revenge. The caption in BL Or. 1404 begins instead with verse 22, “the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground,” with its emphasis on trust, and only then quotes the verse of divine retribution, “the LORD hurled the Egyptians into the sea.”

This distinction is reflected in the illuminations. In the Rylands Haggadah, the crossing is depicted in five bands across the page, a full three of which are devoted to the drowning of the nine grimacing Egyptians. Included among them is Pharaoh, whose crown intrudes on the right-hand border of the scene in a manner unprecedented in any other illumination in the haggadah, calling attention to him dramatically. In BL Or. 1404 there are just four bands, of which but two depict the drowning of the Egyptians, who number only five, their peaceful faces making it seem as if they are but asleep.

Both captions and illustrations here conform to the agenda of each manuscript. In the original manuscript, BL Or. 1404, the scene of the destruction of the Egyptians is relatively low-key, and the Israelites are not an army but a diverse group of individuals whose victory is one of trust rather than of prowess. The caption begins with the verse emphasizing the trust of the Israelites in God, a theme central to the BL Or. 1404 authorship; the verse describing Egypt’s downfall is moved to the end of the caption. I have observed that the authorship of BL Or. 1404 generally avoided depicting the triumph of the Israelites lest it appear too vengeful and triumphalistic. But in an iconographic depiction of the narrative of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, showing the salvation of the Israelites, it is unavoidable.

Moreover, the text describes the salvation of the Israelites in a strong and central parallel to the Egyptian destruction, not merely as an addendum to it, as in the case of

the plagues. As a result, the authorship of BL Or. 1404 could not engage in its accustomed tendency to downplay the display of Israelite triumph. Still, while both the illustration and the caption acknowledge the downfall of the Egyptians, their dominant theme is the trust in God demonstrated by the Israelites, a group that is largely unarmed and that includes women and elderly persons.³⁰

The Rylands Haggadah once again diverges from BL Or. 1404, its model, in tending toward vengeful themes. The depiction of divine retribution upon the Egyptians is emphasized. The addendum of the triumph (and concurrent revenge) of the Israelites is familiar from the Rylands Haggadah's treatment of the plagues, in which Israelite immunity is shown consistently alongside Egyptian affliction in a triumphalistic mode. In the illumination, this triumphalism is manifest in the amplification of the visual depiction of Egyptian suffering in the characterization of the Israelites as a nation of soldiers, pointing mockingly at the drowning Egyptians.

Thus, the small difference between the visual content and the nature and order of the caption verses effects a conceptual shift. While BL Or. 1404, with its subtle deemphasis on vengeful themes, privileges the narrative of the trust of the Israelites over the description of the downfall of the Egyptians, the Rylands Haggadah, true to its tendency toward greater vengefulness, highlights the retribution upon the Egyptians, and only later tells of the salvation of the Israelites. The authorship of each haggadah has configured what appears at first glance to be identical material in a manner that is actually quite differentiated, and the emphasis that each has imparted to the scene—a feeling of restraint in the case of BL Or. 1404, and a heightened sense of militarism and vengeance in the case of the Rylands Haggadah—is echoed in the captions that accompany the scene, resulting in an integration of text and image to speak the distinctive position of each authorship's larger conceptual framework.

REVEALING UNDERLYING PREOCCUPATIONS

Throughout this analysis I have noted certain internal conventions characteristic of each of the manuscripts. The authorship of the original manuscript, BL Or. 1404, has a tendency toward symbolic numeration of the "People of Israel," and toward iconic meaningfulness, moving away from textual accuracy as it omits certain details called for in the biblical text. The authorship of the Rylands Haggadah is less concerned with significant numbers and iconic valence, causing the "crowd scenes" or the depictions of the slain Egyptian firstborn to be more generic but insisting on rather strict textual fidelity.

The attitude of each authorship toward literalism reflects, in each case, a broader underlying ideological agenda. In the case of BL Or. 1404, that agenda is characterized by a quietism, a predilection to limit vengeful sentiments, and even, on occasion, an almost empathic stance toward the suffering of the Egyptians. The Rylands Haggadah

evinces a desire to amplify both the suffering of the Egyptians and the “triumph” of the Israelites, constituting a heightened militancy and a triumphal and sometimes almost gleeful vengefulness.

Having delineated the internal conventions for representation in each manuscript, I find further corroboration for my observations about each work’s underlying ideological agenda by noting those which the authorship controverts its own internal conventions in order to emphasize what seems for the authorship to be the most important aspect of that ideology. So, although, for example, the authorship of BL Or. 1404 prefers to construct the iconography with a symbolic/typological and iconic bent, whereas the authorship of the Rylands Haggadah tends to champion the literal, each authorship in fact violates its own conventions regarding literalism and symbolism on certain occasions. It is at those moments that the underlying ideologies permeating each work—the highest values of its authorship—emerge into the light. Indeed, ideology—as expressed in the emotional tone, tenor, and moral “voice” of the iconography—can trump tendencies toward the symbolic/typological, as well as preferences for the literal. A good example of this is the very question with which I began my analysis: that of numeration, and the manner in which the nation of Israel is designated within each manuscript.

Recall that when a choice was available the captioner of BL Or. 1404 generally utilized verses that feature the term *bnei Yisra’el* (the Israelites, or the People or Children of Israel) in order to emphasize the symbolic meaning of any particular group of Israelites. The captioner of the Rylands Haggadah more commonly employed verses that label the Israelites *ha-‘am* (the people), a more general and literal designation. But in BL Or. 1404’s illumination of the depiction of the Exodus (plate 58, top), one sees how this general rule was subverted to express the authorship’s most important underlying value, thus serving what the authorship obviously viewed as a higher ideological purpose rather than emphasizing the symbolic number in the crowd scene. The verse chosen for the caption is Exodus 12:34: “So the people [*ha-‘am*] took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders.” This use of a verse in which the Israelites are designated as *ha-‘am*—unusual in BL Or. 1404—emerges from the desire of the authorship to limit the militarism of the illustration, as the verse for this juncture in the narrative that utilizes the phrase *bnei Yisra’el* is militaristic: “Now the Israelites (*bnei Yisra’el*) went up armed” (Exodus 13:18). Because for the authorship of BL Or. 1404 the prioritizing of a nonvengeful message trumps the symbolic value of using the term *bnei Yisra’el*, it has atypically instructed the captioner to revert to a use of *ha-‘am* in order to avoid mentioning the armed Israelites.

On the other hand, “Now the Israelites (*bnei Yisra’el*) went up armed” is precisely the

verse chosen by the authorship of the Rylands Haggadah for the more heavily militaristic depiction of the Exodus (plate 59, top). The same tendency of ideology to trump general iconographic practice pertains here: because the authorship desired the more “militant” verse, the Rylands Haggadah captioner was asked to employ a verse uncharacteristically containing the phrase *bnei Yisra’el*.

The proclivity on the part of BL Or. 1404’s authorship to limit the vengefulness of the iconography can even controvert the strong inclination of its iconography toward fidelity to the scriptural narrative. This instance is subtler because it is accomplished via an omission. Regarding the murrain—the fifth of the ten plagues upon Egypt—the biblical text says that “all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but of the livestock of the Israelites not a beast died” (Exodus 9:6). BL Or. 1404 omits the saved cattle of the Israelites, while the Rylands Haggadah depicts them (plates 50, bottom; 51, bottom). Indeed, the entire final half of the verse—“of the livestock of the Israelites not a beast died”—seems to be ignored by the authorship of BL Or. 1404, making the scene in that manuscript less fully realized than its rendition in the Rylands Haggadah. A similar omission occurs in the illustrations of the plague of darkness (Exodus 10:23). In BL Or. 1404 Pharaoh and his courtiers sit in darkness while only Moses and Aaron (without the other Israelites) are shown in the light. The Rylands Haggadah depicts all the Israelites in a light-filled space, gesturing toward Pharaoh and his courtiers, who sit in darkness (plates 54, bottom; 55, bottom).³¹

The omission of the healthy Israelite cattle and the light-filled dwellings of Goshen in BL Or. 1404 in spite of their prominence in scripture constitutes a major difference between BL Or. 1404 and the Rylands Haggadah. In the case of these plagues, BL Or. 1404 depicts the affliction of the Egyptians without illustrating the salvation of the Israelites. The Rylands Haggadah copies BL Or. 1404 but adds to the depiction of the punishment of the Egyptians the preservation of the Israelites, thus illustrating both God’s vengeance on Egypt, and the Israelites’ living the good life while that retribution is effected. In light of the inclusion of these elements in the later manuscript, it is easier to see what the authorship of the normally very textually faithful BL Or. 1404 is doing here. In keeping with its quietistic and nonvengeful attitude, it allows itself an avowal of triumph while disavowing triumphalism. It is as if depicting the suffering of the Egyptians was narratologically necessary, but highlighting the preservation of the Israelites would have constituted an excessive, almost gleeful vengefulness. So the authorship of BL Or. 1404 stops short of parading this sort of *schadenfreude*, although whether from fear of censorship, or from genuine compassionate tendencies, it is impossible to know.³²

I have already noted—and will have occasion to return to—the ways in which the authorship of medieval Jewish manuscripts could read “against the text”: counter-midrashically (as in the case of Joseph and the slaves in the Birds’ Head Haggadah), and

even counterscripturally (as in the case of the possible “resurrection” of Rachel in the depiction of the Golden Haggadah). The omission of part of a verse is a milder version of such exegetical strategies. It is an *ex silentio* argument about what is important and must be included, versus what can (or should) remain unsaid. A choice on the part of the authorship of BL Or. 1404 to downplay the triumph of the Israelites, while the authorship of the Rylands Haggadah plays it up, is certainly significant in helping to unravel the divergent social and theological agendas of these manuscripts, which—more like parent and child than “siblings”—are less identical than they seem.³³

10

Iconography in Dialogue

THROUGHOUT THE FOREGOING chapters I have been imagining ingeniously creative authorship constellations—patrons, rabbinic advisers, artists—working together to draw upon any number of elements from the stream of essentially common medieval culture that flowed by both Jews and Christians in a quest to create something indigenously, intrinsically, and integrally Jewish that would at the same time be utterly stylish and instantly recognizable as a product of its time and place, whether Mainz circa 1300 or Barcelona circa 1320. I have observed how each culture drew symbols—occasionally identical ones—from this common pool of motifs and each adapted them to its particular needs. The figures of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Zipporah, David and Elijah were the common heritage of Jews and Christians, and each group utilized these figures to make particular exegetical, typological, or anagogical points relevant to its own agenda, occasionally in relation to the art or texts of the other group. I understand the “anxiety of influence” to have extended in both directions.

Nonetheless, when Jewish iconography leaves the realm of the Hebrew Bible and one begins to observe in it motifs that are obviously based in the New Testament or in iconography clearly originally designed to present Christian theology, is it still possible to accurately speak of Jews adopting transparently and concertedly “Christian” motifs? While elements like haloed angels lie on the cusp of this sort of activity, it seems to me that the illustration of the quail descending in the Birds’ Head Haggadah in the image and likeness of the dove of the Holy Spirit, with the divine hands distributing manna in the form of the “Greek blessing,” or the mother grieving, Pietà-like, over her dead son in the Golden Haggadah, testify to Jews fishing, so to speak, in a definitively Christian stream.

In examining instances like this it behooves one to consider why Jews are fishing in this stream, and to ask how, once they adopted these distinctively Christian motifs, they used them in a new Jewish context. In this chapter I focus on a particular iconographic configuration found in all three of the fourteenth-century Catalonian haggadot studied herein. In the Golden Haggadah it appears on folio 10v (fig. 65; plate 35, top left); in BL Or. 1404 it is on folio 2r (see fig. 81; plate 42, bottom), and in the Rylands Haggadah on folio 14r (see fig. 80; plate 43, bottom).¹

The image in each case comprises a woman in traveling clothes seated on a donkey and holding two small children as a man accompanies the beast on foot. It seems, at first glance, “rather like” the standard motif of what art historians call *The Holy Family’s Flight*



into Egypt.² That narrative is found in the second chapter of Matthew's gospel. Herod, having learned from astrologers that a child is to be born who will be the promised messiah of the Jews, is determined to hunt down Mary's child and destroy him. Joseph is instructed by a messenger of the Lord to take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until God gives him instructions. After Herod's death a heavenly messenger again appears in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, telling him to get ready, take the child and his mother, and return to the land of Israel; for "those who were seeking the child's life are dead" (Matthew 2:13–21). In standard contemporary iconography, Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus flee Bethlehem for Egypt (fig. 66).

But even a cursory glance will indicate that although the haggadah illuminations bear some similarities to the iconography of the flight into Egypt—that turning point in the life of Jesus—the subject of these illustrations is, in fact, another flight into Egypt, a flight that is less well represented in the history of art yet is definitely a turning point in the life of Moses. Moses, having fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian, makes his home in Midian. Appearing as an Egyptian, he meets and marries the daughter of a priest of that place. After a few years—the couple having been blessed with two sons—Moses receives the divine message that "all the men who sought to kill you are dead." Exodus 4:20 continues: "So Moses took his wife and his sons, mounted them on the ass, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God with him." Obviously,

FIGURE 65
Moses' family's flight into Egypt.
Golden Haggadah, fol. 10v (detail)

FIGURE 66
Flight into Egypt, Jean Pucelle, fl.
1320, Metropolitan Museum of Art,
The Cloisters MS 54.1.2, *Book of
Hours for Jeanne D'Evreux*, France,
first quarter of the fourteenth century,
fol. 83 (detail)



FIGURE 67
The modest Zipporah. Golden Haggadah, fol. 10v (detail)

it is this flight into Egypt in the Hebrew scriptures that provides a typological point of departure and even parts of the “script” for the account of the New Testament.

Let me begin with the treatment of the scene in the Golden Haggadah, where a beardless Moses, bearing a spear, leads a donkey carrying Zipporah, his wife, a shawl pulled over her head, and holding her two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. He is greeted by his brother Aaron at the left. There are several notable differences between this illustration and the traditional iconography for the flight into Egypt. These differences lead one to posit two possible intellectual contexts for this illumination: polemic and typological, with the understanding that those genres tend to overlap. The first and most transparent departure from the standard iconography of the flight into Egypt is the fact that there are two babies in this picture. This may be seen, *ab initio*, as a polemic against the singularity of Jesus. Though two babies are obviously called for in the narrative context of Exodus 4:20, their prominent display in exactly the traditional position of baby Jesus serves to make it abundantly clear to the viewer that this is another flight into Egypt, and that it is not about Jesus. It affords the opportunity to highlight that Zipporah, Moses’ wife, while clearly not a virgin, is yet no less modest and unprepossessing than is Mary, mother of Jesus (fig. 67).³

The two children also introduce the theme of the fruitfulness of the line of Moses as opposed to the barrenness of the line of Jesus. While the portrayal of Jesus as the only begotten Son of God, never corrupted by woman, was a fine model for Christian clerics, it was uncomfortable and even repugnant for Jews, for whom family life and biological persistence were paramount. There is an emphasis in the midrashic tradition, particularly in the Exodus stories, on the fertility and continuity of the Jewish “family line.”⁴

Continuing the theme of fruitfulness, Moses is depicted as beardless and young, in deliberate juxtaposition to his brother Aaron, a bearded and dignified old man. He appears in contradistinction to Joseph, the husband of Mary, who, in Christian visual culture of this period, is depicted as an older man. He is not yet troped in a particularly negative manner, as he would be later in the century, but always as a subsidiary and rather sad character. Joseph is, furthermore, the type of the Synagogue, cuckolded by God in favor of the Church (fig. 68).⁵

The placement of a tree directly behind the head of Moses may be significant. Throughout the Golden Haggadah are a number of trees, some with obvious narrative significance, like the burning bush (plate 35, top right). Other trees seem to serve decorative functions. The direct connection of this tree with the figure of Moses may indicate that it has some symbolic valence, as such trees often do in Jewish manuscripts. A scene of a Jewish bridal procession, from an Italian Maḥzor of the late fifteenth century, for instance, depicts a man shooting a bird in a beautiful espaliered tree situated directly above the head of the bride (fig. 69). Conforming to the symbolic language of the secular love



and marriage poetry and art of the manuscript's place and date, this tree is clearly a reference to the bride's fertility, just as the hunted bird refers to the capture of her virginity.⁶

Christian typology proclaimed Jesus to be the crowning blossom of the root of Jesse. To the Christian mind Jesus was the ultimate flowering of the divine promise. But Jews saw the flowering of that promise in their own children; they continued to long for a messiah yet to come from among their progeny. In their eyes, the wood of the cross upon which Jesus met his death was not the Tree of Life but a barren branch. For them, Jesus represented not the expected "shoot from the stock of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1) but a "stock sprouting poison weed and wormwood" (Deuteronomy 29:18). Jews did not accept the allegorical leap of Christian theology that made Jesus fertile because he was the generator of salvation; though he represents the denouement of history he produces no physical offspring. Moses is the active continuer of the Israelite line.

Moses' legacy—his family tree and his Torah—are a fruitful Tree of Life, not a barren cross. Hence Moses is depicted as young and handsome, and the tree that springs from directly behind his head is green and flourishing. There is also a tree above Joseph's head in Dürer's *Flight into Egypt* (1496), but this tree, growing out of a crag in the rock, is a symbol of Jesus' miraculous advent in spite of Joseph's infertility, just as the unicorn above Mary's head symbolically testifies to her virginity (fig. 70). In the place of his traditional rod, and also in place of the traveling staff carried by Joseph, Moses carries a spear, which functions on both the polemic and the typological level. Amos Funkenstein

FIGURE 68
Ecclesia and Synagoga, Master of the St. Ursula Legend, Flemish, before 1482, Bruges, Groeningemuseum

FIGURE 69
BL MS Harley 5686, *Mahzor*, Italy, late fifteenth century, fol. 27v





has described the ways that Spanish Jews could read biblical history typologically in their texts. This iconography seems to function in the same way. Here, Moses' return to Egypt to redeem his people serves as an internal Jewish typology of redemption. Moses, abandoning his Egyptian identity as he leaves Midian, is a type for the Jews, who abandon their identity as slaves as they leave Egypt. Thus, he bears a spear at his personal exodus, foreshadowing the great national exodus of which scripture, as I have noted, says: "and the Children of Israel left Egypt armed" (Exodus 13:18, per midrash, and plates 58, top; 59, top; 60; 61).⁷

Polemically, if Moses is presented in contradistinction to Joseph, Mary's husband, who is a symbol of the Synagogue, it must be remembered that the standard attribute of the Synagogue is a broken spear (see fig. 68, left). Moses' spear is here unbroken, standing, perhaps, as a symbol of *Synagoga militans* and an expression of the confidence that the Torah of Moses will remain a viable weapon against Christianity.⁸

That a dog accompanies Moses and his family is also interesting. The *pshat* (contextual interpretation) of this detail, when taken in the context of the illumination of Moses' encounter with God before the burning bush, the previous illustration in the iconographic narrative of the Golden Haggadah, is that this is the Ben 'Amram family dog. Yet the appearance of dogs in haggadot, like that of trees, may be fraught with multifarious valences. I have elsewhere discussed the hare hunt as a symbol of the oppression of Israel by the nations of the world. In the Sarajevo Haggadah, for example, it appears in conjunction with the phrase, "And the Egyptians pressured us" (fig. 71).

Simultaneously more veiled and more explicit is a depiction in the mid-fourteenth-century Barcelona Haggadah of a hare being served a drink by a dog (fig. 75). This

FIGURE 70 OPPOSITE
Dürer, *Flight into Egypt*, 1496, Dresden, Gemäldegalerie

FIGURE 71 ABOVE
" [The Egyptians] pressured us." A dog pursues a hare. Sarajevo, National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo Haggadah, Aragon, c. 1320–1335, fol. 47v (detail)



illustration seems like a typical example of *mundus inversus* iconography. It appears as an upper marginal illustration for the text “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.” The lower margin depicts the Israelites slaving in Egypt; the implication here is, “We *were* slaves, but one day the Egyptian dogs will serve us!” The dog is clearly a symbol for the Egyptians. A dog that appears prominently in the foreground of the illustration of the Exodus in the Kaufmann Haggadah (fig. 73) has its mouth open with no tongue in evidence to represent the fulfillment of God’s promise to the Israelites: “There shall be a loud cry in the Land of Egypt . . . but not a dog shall whet his tongue” at any of them (Exodus 11:6–7). Even in the biblical text, where the silence of the dogs appears in apposition to the loud cry of Egypt, the dogs are the mirror image of the Egyptians themselves: both are miraculously prevented from hindering the Israelites.⁹

Thus the dogs often shown accompanying Pharaoh and the Egyptian nobles in haggadah illumination may not be merely “corroborative detail” in the service of “artistic



FIGURE 72 OPPOSITE
BL MS Add. 14761, fol. 30v

FIGURE 73 ABOVE
Budapest, Hungarian Academy of
Sciences, Kaufmann collection, MS A
422, *Kaufmann Haggadah*, Catalonia,
second half of the fourteenth century,
fol. 39r

verisimilitude” (fig. 74; plates 44, 45, 47, 53, top). These dogs symbolically represent Egypt, in iconographic parallel to the midrashic use of the expression “Pharaoh and *Mizrayim* (Egypt; that is, ‘the Egyptians’).”¹⁰ Because dogs are associated with the enemies of Israel in Jewish manuscripts it should not be surprising to find dogs associated with the enemies of Jesus in Christian visual culture, particularly with Jews. As surely as one finds dogs accompanying Pharaoh in Jewish manuscripts one finds them accompanying Pilate or Jesus’ “Jewish enemies” in Christian visual culture (figs. 75–77).

Luke’s shepherds “abiding in the fields” are invariably accompanied by dogs in central positions, which one could take for local color (fig. 78) were it not for those instances in which the dog is so prominent and so disturbing that it cannot be read as a positive or even a neutral symbol. A black dog with a spiked collar baying at the angels in the Rohan Hours (fig. 79) is a symbol of the Jewish dogs, who, like the Jewish shepherds, are witness to the message of Jesus’ birth but clearly do not comprehend its implications so fully as

FIGURE 74 RIGHT
JRUL MS Heb 6, fol. 17r (detail)



FIGURE 75 BELOW
Christ before Pilate, Master of the
Oberstein Altar, Germany, early
fifteenth century, Mainz, Mittelrhe-
inisches Landesmuseum





the gentile Magi do. Returning to the dog watching the burning bush one may, perhaps, read it as a type for the Egyptians who will witness God’s wonders in Egypt. And the dog accompanying Moses’ “Holy Family” as they leave Midian may typologically foreshadow the silence of the Egyptian dogs at the moment of the Exodus from Egypt, or even the mixed multitude that accompanied the Israelites at that time.

TRUE TO FORM

Now that I have discussed the internal similarities and differences between the Rylands Haggadah and BL Or. 1404, the illumination of Moses’ family’s flight into Egypt presents an opportunity to examine the relationship of each of these manuscripts to the iconography of the surrounding culture and the different shades of cross-cultural reflection manifested in each. First the similarities: BL Or. 1404 (plate 42, bottom) and the Rylands Haggadah (plate 43, bottom), like the Golden Haggadah, go out of their way to depict the seemingly minor and peripheral scene of Moses with his wife and sons on the donkey (figs. 80, 81). Like the Golden Haggadah, both BL Or. 1404 and the Rylands Haggadah introduce a second scene. The patrons of the Golden Haggadah chose to connect the flight into Egypt with the moment when Aaron meets Moses and his family (Exodus 4:27b). But in BL Or. 1404 and the Rylands Haggadah, the flight is connected with the narrative immediately following: that of the circumcision of Moses’ son (Exodus 4:24). In that episode, God seeks to kill Moses’ infant during the night, but Zipporah averts

FIGURE 76
Christ before Pilate, Master of the Hersbruck Altar, Germany, c. 1480–1490, Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum

FIGURE 77
Dürer, *Christ Among the Doctors*, begun 1496, Dresden, Gemäldegalerie



FIGURE 78
Paris, BN, MS nouv. acq. fr. 16251, *Life of Christ and the Saints*, N. France, 1268–1298, fol. 22v (detail)

the divine wrath by hastily circumcising the child and throwing the foreskin at Moses’ feet, proclaiming him to be her “bridegroom of blood.” BL Or. 1404 was the model for the Rylands Haggadah. But because the illustration of this scene in BL Or. 1404 has been described as being configured “as in the Rylands Haggadah but without the personification of Midian and Egypt,”¹¹ I will begin my analysis by challenging that categorization, demonstrating that the differences are, in fact, considerably more extensive.

By including the personifications of Egypt and Midian (allegedly the only distinctive elements in the illumination) the authorship of the Rylands Haggadah underscores the sense of movement or journey, spotlighting this scene as a linking episode that, at its most basic level, has to do with a shift in geography from Midian to Egypt. Thus,



FIGURE 79
Paris, BN, MS lat. 9471, *Rohan Hours*, France, 1419–1427, fol. 85v

although the personifications are by nature “iconic,” their use is essentially narrative, and they serve (characteristically for the Rylands Haggadah) to demonstrate fidelity to the scriptural account. Moses is physically the largest and most significant character here (fig. 80). Even though Zipporah is seated on a donkey and should be taller than Moses, he towers over her. Moses is headed toward Egypt with the rod with which he will perform the “signs.” The rod is prominent and held in front of his body. He does not lean upon it, nor does it touch the ground, as it does in the top panel of the folio. It has lost its function as a shepherd’s crook or a traveling staff and has fully become the “rod of God.” This is accentuated by the text caption, “And Moses took the rod of God with him” (Exodus 4:20). A frowning Zipporah (contrast her visage with the gentle,

placid, and slightly bemused look of Moses) sits in full profile, one child clinging to her back while she supports—or perhaps restrains—a second child in her lap. He appears to dangle from the arm she has thrown around him and under his own arm, as he pitches forward and points toward the scene of circumcision at the left.

In that scene, Zipporah sits on the ground, pins the child with her left arm, her elbow under his armpit, her shoulder at his throat, the knife and the circumcising hand clearly present between his legs (see fig. 80). It is an image of *déshabillement* and of some haste, if not violence; Zipporah's face is set in a frown or grimace, and her brow is knit. Her cloak has slipped from her head, revealing her hairnet and white cap, and is bunched at her side, caught in the crook of the circumcising arm. Her knees are drawn up, her feet visible. As per the tendency of the Rylands Haggadah authorship, this naturalistic treatment of the circumcision cleaves closely to the biblical text, which emphasizes the violent and hasty nature of Zipporah's circumcision of her son in Exodus 4:25.

In the version in the Rylands Haggadah every iconographic unit is solidly narrative, and even the elements within it that have the potential to be symbolic—the staff, the donkey, the personified cities—are used to corroborate and further the scriptural account. The staff is the “rod of God,” significant for what it has done in the previous episodes and what it will do in the ensuing ones. The donkey is a mere conveyance, facing forward and small in scale. The personified figures serve to localize the scene: they are labeled in the text caption as “Midian” and “Egypt.” This is simply the road from Midian to Egypt rather than (as I shall shortly observe, in the case of the Golden Haggadah and in BL Or. 1404) another, more iconic or typological, road.

In BL Or. 1404, by contrast, is more naturalistic in scale, with Moses shown behind the donkey and lower than Zipporah, as proper scale and perspective would dictate. His rod is nearly concealed, disappearing behind Zipporah, and assuming the function of a mere donkey-goad rather than the “rod of God.” In contrast to the text in the Rylands Haggadah version, with its emphasis on Moses and the “rod of God,” the text used by BL Or. 1404 places the emphasis on Zipporah (making Moses the agent by which they mount their conveyance of choice) and does not mention his mission or his rod at all: “So Moses took his wife and sons, mounted them on an ass, and went back to the land of Egypt” (Exodus 4:20). A smiling Zipporah is depicted astride, in three-quarter profile (fig. 81). While the baby at her hip is in a position analogous to the one in the Rylands Haggadah, she enfolds him in her lap tenderly, supporting him from below rather than dangling him on her arm. And he turns toward her, focusing on her instead of pointing to the scene at the bottom left as in the Rylands depiction.

That scene can hardly be recognized as a circumcision; one sees neither knife nor circumcising hand, nor—most significant in comparison with the Rylands Haggadah version—any restraining arm (see fig. 81). Moreover, the baby is smiling broadly and



FIGURE 80
Rylands Haggadah, fol. 14r (detail)

FIGURE 81 BELOW
BL Or. 1404, fol. 2r (detail)



reaching up to touch his mother's face. The mother is seated on the ground, completely covered; there is no evidence of struggle and no revealing of feet or knees. The non-violence of the "circumcision" here also serves as a rejoinder to the iconography of the circumcision of Jesus, which by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries could be depicted as a gruesome ritual instigated by bizarrely garbed strangers ("the Jews") to which Jesus submits—foreshadowing the Crucifixion—in a scene replete with evocations of pain and

FIGURE 82
Circumcision of Jesus, Master of
the Tucher Altar, Germany c. 1450,
Aachen, Suermondt-Museum



brutal savagery (fig. 82). Here, by way of contrast, the child is in the arms of his mother, and he smiles. Because the wound of the circumcision is invisible, it remains uncertain whether it has yet occurred or is about to. This is most unlike the iconography of the circumcision of Jesus, in which he is shown either submitting passively to the knife or exhibiting pain or fear, but certainly not rejoicing in the event.¹²

Overall, the impression one gets of Zipporah in the BL Or. 1404 is of a composed, benevolent (and, as she is accoutered in both scenes in a stylish traveling hat, an elegant) presence. This highlighting of Zipporah—larger than Moses and the central focus of the illumination—accords with the gynocentric emphases of BL Or. 1404, with its inclusion of women in many crucial scenes, and contrasts with the relative absence of women in the Rylands Haggadah and the concomitant deemphasis of the figure of Zipporah in that manuscript, and its depiction of her as rather cross and put out. Indeed, the contrast is so strong that Zipporah appears in BL Or. 1404 as a fitting analogue of the Madonna, calm and elegant in simplicity. Even her stance on the ground recalls the dignified and elegant trecento Madonnas of Humility (fig. 83). And in the manner of Madonnas created for or commissioned by wealthy patrons, she (like the Israelite slaves in this manuscript)

is only playing at being the country girl; her clothing marks her as an elegant urban sophisticate, most probably like the manuscript's patron. While the referee is clearly the Madonna, the referent is not the historical Zipporah, the Zipporah of narrative, but an iconic Zipporah, who both echoes and purposely rivals the Madonna. The intent here is to demonstrate that the woman in the life of the founder of Israelite religion—a mortal Jewish wife and mother—is no less pure, holy, glowing, dignified, and elegant than the nearly deified Mother of God. In fact, sans the open cloak and the nursing breast, Zipporah as Madonna even exceeds the Virgin in modesty. In a manner typical of the BL Or. 1404, the privileging of Zipporah over the Madonna is accomplished by subtle mirroring rather than by aggressive polemic.

The Zipporah of the Rylands Haggadah makes little reference to the Madonna either in appearance, position, or stance. In fact, details such as her frowning expression and knit brow, her tense or agitated manner, the way in which the baby does not relate to her but turns away, not to mention the glowering and frankly violent manner in which she later pins her child in order to circumcise him, mark her an anti-Madonna. Instead of mirroring Christian iconography the authorship takes a defiant stance outside of and against it, contextualizing Zipporah in a distinctively Jewish way and polemicizing in the manner customary for this manuscript. In such a context, the narrative refers to what it refers, neither to some eschatological denouement nor to some competing tradition. It “answers” the image of the Madonna by somewhat assertively turning it on its head. Instead, the emphasis here is on Moses’ mission; it is about the circumcision and consequent redemption of the firstborn son.¹³

Although the authorship of BL Or. 1404 was clearly invested in the analogy between Zipporah and the Madonna, it took care to bound and limit that analogy. The Zipporah of BL Or. 1404, as I have said, is glowing and benevolent. But she lacks the slightly sad, reflective, contemplative visage with which she appears in the Golden Haggadah. And in this she differs as much from the version of Zipporah-as-Madonna as depicted in the Golden Haggadah as she does from the anti-Madonna of the Rylands Haggadah. The Golden Haggadah’s Zipporah, with her inward-turned gaze (fig. 84), fully replicates the Madonna’s knowledge, through the prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:35), of the fact that the baby cradled in her arms at the beginning of his life will once again be cradled there at the end of it, when the scene is recapitulated as the Pietà. The artist of the Golden Haggadah was very much aware of this, painting her tiny pout and downcast eyes with a brush that was no thicker than an eyelash in a space no bigger than a pinkie nail. By way of contrast, the authorship of BL Or. 1404 stops short of what might be called a full



FIGURE 83
Master of the Straus Madonna,
Madonna of Humility, Italian, 1350–
1420, Sterling and Francine Clark Art
Institute, Williamstown, Massachu-
setts, 1968.304

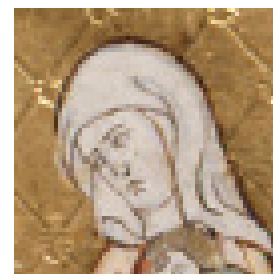


FIGURE 84
Zipporah’s pout, Golden Haggadah,
fol. 10v (detail)

emotional appropriation of the Christian theme, intuiting that in the case of Zipporah a depiction of that particular sense of foreboding would be out of place with regard to her son, who, after all, will never lie dead in his mother's arms. So what remains is the shining presence of the Madonna without the bittersweet presentiment. Even the circumcision scene, which could have become a sort of "Pietà," remains a "Madonna and Child." The Zipporah-Madonna analogy is more considered and developed in the case of the BL Or. 1404 than in the Golden Haggadah: by not going "all the way" the authorship demonstrates a deeper understanding of the sources in Christian visual culture on which it drew. Clearly the BL Or. 1404 authorship understood the ultimate reference of the downcast eyes of the Madonna and why that look would have been inappropriate here.

ON THE ROAD TO REDEMPTION

All these details are important in understanding the transformation of the iconography in each of these contexts. But the signal issue here is the larger one: why such an apparently incidental scene was chosen for depiction at all, in light of the limited space available to the artist. The answer is that this scene is by no means incidental. In his commentary on Exodus 4:20, Rashi uses the narrative of the return of Moses' family to Egypt to illuminate a course of sacred history that is both linear and cyclical. He takes as his exegetical point of departure the word "the ass [*ha-ḥamor*]." Rashi's commentary imparts an emphasis to the direct article through which he "reveals" an understanding of the place of this particular donkey in history and in eschatology: "The ass: That is; the [same] ass 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'" (Zechariah 9:9).

Rashi here uses an aggadic connection present in *Pirkei De-Rabi Eliezer*.¹⁴ Both Rashi's commentary and *Pirkei De-Rabi Eliezer* were known in Spain, and aggadic details from *Pirkei De-Rabi Eliezer* appear in the iconography of Catalonian haggadot.¹⁵ But Rashi, the consummate grammarian, ingeniously links this aggadic detail with an explication of the humble definite article—the letter *heh*—showing how that grammatical particle literally transfigures the plebeian donkey and is transfigured by it. The donkey (*ḥamor*) is transmuted by the letter *heh* (*ha-ḥamor*) as surely as Abram is transformed to Abraham by the addition of the letter *heh* from the divine Name. This beast of burden 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 (fig. 85). This advance is constantly in danger of being forestalled; by Abraham’s potential lack of faith, by Moses’ self-doubt, by humankind’s evil or indifference. But it is the donkey, the very same donkey, which moves, slowly, determinedly, with plodding perseverance, inexorably through history, toward personal, national, and, finally, universal deliverance.

In the Golden Haggadah, the donkey, as I have noted, appears in the very first illumination, that of Adam naming the animals (see figs. 41, 42; plate 27, top right). It is among the animals preserved from the Flood, and it resurfaces in the illustration of the *‘Akedah* (plate 29, top left). In this manner the authorship of the Golden Haggadah gives visual life to the midrash of the donkey that moves through history. In fact, in including the beast in the scenes previous to that of the *‘Akedah*, the authorship antedates the midrashic account, revealing the donkey as a miraculous element in history yet paradoxically also part of the original creation, like Balaam’s ass, which was “created at twilight on the eve of the Sabbath” (*Mishnah ‘Avot 5:6*).¹⁶

The “distinctiveness” of the donkey in this illumination is conveyed by both its appearance and its behavior. The donkey is shaped like a finely bred horse, and it lifts its well-formed front leg like a noble beast preparing to trot toward its destination.¹⁷ In the Rylands Haggadah the donkey is small and asinine in shape, distinctive neither in appearance nor in behavior, a mere conveyance. In BL Or. 1404, the donkey is likewise a meaningful element rather than a mere conveyance. The authorship took pains to emphasize the “donkey-ness” of the donkey as a symbol of the halting progress toward redemption; in the illumination, the head of this stubborn or reluctant beast is turned back. The donkey in BL Or. 1404 is not simply turning its head back, but away from the scene where Gershom is about to be (or just has been) circumcised. This highlights the animal’s polyvalence as a symbol, which can be charted as a progression of associations

FIGURE 85
Washington, D.C., Library of Congress,
Jewish Division, Passover Haggadah,
Joel b. Simeon, Germany, 1478, fol.
19v (detail)

from the specific to the general: the donkey's behavior (turning away from the act of circumcision even as it attempts to move forward) mirrors Moses' neglect of (his turning away from) his responsibility for circumcising his son. The donkey's turning away from its appointed direction foreshadows the stubbornness of the Israelites who "did not listen to [Moses] because of shortness of spirit and hard labor" (Exodus 6:9). Finally, its resistance—the manner in which it literally drags its feet—is symptomatic of the halting nature of the progress of the Jews (and the world) toward redemption.¹⁸

As in the case of the smiling Zipporah, the donkey's polyvalence of reference in BL Or. 1404 causes its conception once again to exceed that of the Golden Haggadah in subtlety; the reluctant donkey, in seeming to react to the circumcision, is a richer iconographic symbol than the "distinguished" donkey. The distinguished donkey, emerging from a particular midrash (rich as it may be), is ultimately a statement about the progress of redemption alone. The reluctant donkey—the invention of the authorship—when coupled with the circumcision scene, comments about the progress of redemption as well, but multiplies analogies to include the hesitancy of Moses and the stubbornness of the Israelites.¹⁹

It is with a certain irony that Rashi quotes the midrash about the donkey. One had only to be in the streets of Troyes on Palm Sunday to witness pageants featuring Jesus, in effigy, riding on an ass into the church (fig. 86). For Rashi, the Christian interpretation of Zechariah's "poor man, riding on an ass" must have seemed as wooden as the effigies themselves. Rashi's donkey is a Jewish donkey, symbolic of progress rather than culmination; on the road to redemption, but always linked with redemptive history.

This symbolism certainly would not have eluded the authorship or their audience. There is a similar irony in this appropriation of the iconography of a monumental juncture in the course of Christian history to depict a monumental juncture in Jewish history. The image makes a statement about the interconnectedness of Jewish history and its inevitable progress toward redemption. To the Jewish viewer, this donkey is Rashi's donkey, moving through a living continuum of which he or she is a part. The final and most compelling stratum of this iconography is its reflexiveness. It unquestionably reflects a Christian motif, and its presence in these Jewish books requires pondering. And this is not just any Jewish book: it is a book about redemption, past, and future; a living book in which, once again, one can observe Jews in the Middle Ages seeing their own reflection.

Of course these illuminations might have been produced by Christian artists working entirely at their own discretion and bringing in Christian motifs simply because those were what they knew and those motifs "sort of fit." They might have been produced by Jewish artists slavishly copying scenes from the life of Jesus without knowing it, or thinking about what they were doing. They might have been produced for patrons who just



didn't understand, didn't get it, or didn't care—wealthy Jews who simply wanted (and certainly got) an extravagantly lavish and beautiful book.

But what if they were not? In commissioning, depicting, or viewing such a central scene from the Jewish sacred story in the guise of a similar yet ultimately very different scene from Christian history, the authorship—the patrons and their religious advisers, the designers, the illuminators—and their viewers may be playing out their own reflexive replication of Moses' own flight into Egypt. When Moses comes to Midian, he is well-nigh indistinguishable from the Egyptians among whom he was raised. His speech, his appearance, his manner, his carriage—all manage to deceive Jethro's daughters, who report to their father that an "Egyptian man saved us." Yet the readers of the biblical text know the whole story; they know that this is "their" Moses.

Given the style of these manuscripts, it is likely that their authorship and their audience, Catalonian Jews of the early fourteenth century, were indistinguishable in many aspects of their external appearance and material culture from their Catalonian Christian neighbors. Like Moses. Like Zipporah. Like the books. Like the illuminations themselves. The iconography seems to play with this: all its stylistic externals appear not as Jewish but as "Egyptian" (that is, Christian) images. Only the details have been changed. But if one scrutinizes them, these images turn out to be vastly different from their apparent analogues, like Joseph revealing himself to his brothers. And what emerges, as in the case of Moses returning from Midian, is something really very Jewish at heart. Perhaps the authorship is saying something similar about its patrons and audience. Perhaps it is saying something similar about itself as well.

FIGURE 86
BL, MS Arundel 83II, *Psalter of Robert de Lisle*, England, c. 1339, fol. 124v (detail)

Conclusions

We are groping our way through a dark forest. Whether the steps that I am taking now are the right ones, no one can know. But I believe that choosing some road, even if it proves to be the wrong one, is better than waiting until one day the solution may finally [descend like] dew down from heaven. A false road entices [us] to better ones. But where no step is taken at all, no right one will ever be taken either.

—WILL-ERICH PEUKERT, *Pansophie: Ein Versuch zur Geschichte der weissen und schwarzen Magie*, Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1936, 254 (translation: Wouter J. Hanegraaff)

IF, AS THE SAGES ASSERTED, “all beginnings are difficult,” then how much more so are summations, particularly after one has worked for so long on a project so large in scope as this one. My son Misha—age ten when he made the observations about the Birds’ Head Haggadah that marked the beginnings of this project—is a college student now, and studying art history. Recently over lunch he compared two methods of visual analysis to which he has lately been exposed: art history that apprehends the “big picture,” and scholarship that asserts that God (or alternately, the Devil) is in the details. Each, we agreed, is interesting in its own right, and each is suitable for particular media and historical periods. But to be both valid and meaningful, an analysis of any work of art must ultimately comprise both approaches.

Throughout this book I’ve striven to achieve a balance between attention to the details of the illuminations I’ve examined and a contextualization of those details against the overall conceptualization of the manuscripts in which they appear. Each of these aspects of iconography requires a different type of analysis. The details require close observation, the larger context, a broader synthesis. But what one sees when one observes closely and contextualizes broadly will differ, depending on one’s understanding of the place of these works of art as “texts” among other texts in the intellectual and religious contexts of Ashkenaz and Sepharad of the early fourteenth century. Different scholars, depending on their understanding of these contexts, may construe the “facts” of the iconography in entirely different and equally plausible ways.

The foregoing chapters have been my attempt to propose a range of viable meanings for details in Jewish iconography long deemed to be mere approximations or wholesale appropriations of similar iconography in Christian visual culture. The project has not been an attempt to fix meanings, nor has it sought to establish a “Jewish iconography” in any essentializing or reductionist way. I have emphasized throughout that intellectual

microcontexts are localized to particular manuscripts, contingent on the specific education and agenda of the authorship. As I have proceeded, I have mined the iconography of each manuscript for echoes of the ideological, theological, philosophical, historiosophical, political, and social perspectives of its authorship. I have noted in the iconography of each manuscript both leanings toward textual fidelity (as distinct from literalism) and elements of exegetical independence and inventiveness, sometimes countermidrashic and sometimes even counterscriptural in nature. I have probed the various symbolic valences of the iconography to determine whether and when each manuscript is configured in order to make apparently “literal” elements speak beyond themselves, and considered how each does so. I have assumed that each authorship had a theological view: an understanding of God and God’s workings in the world, as well as a particular historiosophy or philosophy of history. Some elements of these were presumably common in the period and locale, others, perhaps, unique to the particular authorship. Though I cannot definitively or even systematically identify all elements of each authorship’s theology and historiosophy, I have attempted to understand them by examining the manner in which each work depicts contemporary Jewish society and the relationships between different kinds of Jews, between Jews and gentiles, and between Jewish and wider society. The tone of each manuscript has been important to me as well: I have sought to judge the moral/emotional tenor projected by the authorship of each work, asking whether it tends to the polemic, quietistic, or pietistic, or to some combination of a variety of tones.

This approach accords in some ways but differs quite radically in others from the one I took a decade and a half ago, when I wrote *Dreams of Subversion*. At that time, there were two predominant models of the medieval Jewish relationship to culture in general and to visual culture in particular. One of these approaches depicted a parochial Jewry blinding itself, like *Synagoga*, to any manifestation in the wider culture, to the degree that any art that emerged from a medieval Jewish context was deemed to have been created by Christians given complete license to create whatever they wished—even blatant anti-semitica—under the noses of their artistically insensitive Jewish patrons. Another scenario was the very opposite of parochial, depicting a rampantly and unthinkingly assimilationist Jewish culture “merely” emulating and imitating Christian culture.

The contrasting view I offered proposed that Jews were very much aware of visual culture and did in fact create it (or commission it under close supervision), and that they did not merely assimilate and adopt but concertedly adapted “Christian” motifs. I railed against art historians who wrote as if Christians owned medieval culture so that Jews could merely emulate it, who continued to conceive of these symbols as “Christian.” But I see now that I myself was doing much the same thing I condemned, even if I tempered it by asserting that the Jews were aware of the “Christian” meaning of motifs and sought a remedy in particular adaptations. My assumption was that those adaptations

were always reactive, and usually polemic. I depicted a single Jewish relationship with a monolithic “Christian culture.” Thanks to more recent scholarship I now understand the situation to be considerably more nuanced. My current perspective is one of a much more “open” Middle Ages, with a stream of essentially common culture drawn upon by both Jews and Christians. Where I had portrayed the relationship of Jewish to Christian iconography as a sort of “love story in aggressive garb,” I now perceive it more as a sort of parallel fishing expedition.

I continue to observe that concerted Christian motifs are occasionally—even often—adapted by Jews with didactic or polemic intent (the *Flight into Egypt* is a particularly obvious example). But I have come to recognize that this is not always, or even usually, the case. Moreover, I have come to accept that if I am going to posit a viable tradition of Jewish iconography, I need to stand up for the independence or interdependence of that tradition, and abandon my previous rather codependent model. It is true that the majority of iconographic examples of any given motif exist in greater numbers in Christian visual culture. But this stems from specific historical circumstances. Jews were a minority presence in medieval culture to begin with. Their aristocrats (those individuals who could afford to commission manuscripts) were, for political and socioeconomic reasons, less numerous than were the Christian aristocrats. Finally, the vast bulk of Jewish manuscript illumination has been lost or destroyed since the Middle Ages because of the precarious position of Jews in Christian society. But just because, for example, there are numerically more “Christian” images of unicorns in the panoply of medieval art than in Jewish examples, the unicorn is not exclusively a “Christian” symbol. An animal identified by both medieval Jews and medieval Christians as a unicorn is mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures, the mutual heritage of Jews and Christians. It was discussed by pagan Greek, Roman, and Hellenistic writers known to both Jews and Christians. It is troped as a Christian allegory in the *Physiologus*, but that work as redacted seems likely to be a Christianized version of a work from Jewish Alexandria. Yes, the Fathers of the Church used the unicorn as a symbol. But the rabbis—both Talmudic and medieval—also described, discussed, and allegorized the unicorn. Finally, it appears in both Jewish and Christian visual culture in the Middle Ages, though more frequently and more famously in Christian visual culture. But its infrequency in Jewish visual culture is only relative, and a result of the circumstances described above. Does any of this make the unicorn “more” of a Christian symbol than a Jewish one? Rethinking my previous thesis, I would no longer assert that any iconographic element short of those that drew directly on the Christian Bible was a “Christian” motif. Rather, I would contend that most iconographic elements were based upon narratives or symbols available to Jews and Christians alike. They were utilized in ways that were occasionally similar, often different, usually dialectic or relational, and intermittently polemic.

Besides espousing a more open view of the details of medieval iconography in the foregoing chapters, I have placed a strong emphasis on each complete manuscript as the locus of those details—on reading such elements in relation with one another and with the continuous narrative of each manuscript as a whole. Because my subject has been haggadot, those ultimate classics of narrative exegesis, I have considered the iconography not as accompanying the story as told by the text but as offering a parallel story: sometimes illustrative of the haggadah text, sometimes commenting upon it, and sometimes standing on its own and making statements, bold or subtle, about the intellectual microcontext in which the manuscript is situated, and aspects of the ideology it expresses.

These, then, are some of the elements that have gone into my attempted reconstruction of the intellectual microcontexts of these haggadot. Of course, as a postmodern researcher, I acknowledge that my interpretations are subjective and that the meanings I ascribe to the iconography are filtered through my particular lens: that of a traditional Jewish education combined with a healthy dose of art-historical scholarship, laced with a strong element of cutting-edge visual theory and informed by the “New History” and the “New Medievalism.” I, like the creators of these manuscripts and like each subsequent interpreter of the illuminations, have been guided to some extent by my own background and agenda even as I attempt to espouse the most objective stance possible.

I recognize that at the end of the day I can never truly be sure that I have apprehended the “original” intellectual microcontexts of these works. I have made certain to approach the manuscripts I have examined as well-planned and well-constructed entities, and with humility regarding what I do know or can know about their iconography and their context. In the spirit of the scholarly chestnut that “all errors are my own,” when I encountered elements I did not understand, I have assumed that they were meaningful to the medieval authorship and lost on me. In examining what other scholars understood as avulsions of the “expected” iconography—changes in the order or configuration that “should not have been” had the authorship followed its models correctly—I have taken the approach that such “faults” lie, in most cases, not with the illuminator or the copyist, but with my own alterity and paucity of understanding of the rich and complex symbolic world within the folia of the manuscripts. Having been wrenched out of their intellectual, social, and temporal context, and lying entombed in the vaults of research libraries, how *can* they be completely understood by a twenty-first-century scholar? To cultivate humility in the face of my own alterity, I have tried to imagine what it would be like for the illuminators of these books to be plunged even into the relatively bucolic setting of Poughkeepsie—let alone into the middle of Times Square—and told to fend for themselves. How much of what they saw would make sense to them? And how much would seem out of order, misplaced, haphazard, or just plain wrong?

Absent the possibility of traveling back in time to interrogate the medieval authorship regarding the parameters of their inner lives, what I have done is more in the nature of a reconstruction, assembled from whatever historical facts are available to me and from the hints that I garner from my close readings of texts and images. It is strongly based in the assumption that these lavish books must have meant something—and conveyed that meaning clearly—to their patrons and their original audiences. Acutely aware of my ultimate subjectivity, I have struggled not to feel trapped into giving up and refusing to construct such microcontexts and to parse their attendant iconography. I have endeavored not to succumb to what I have elsewhere termed “interpretive paralysis.” Rather, I have offered my best attempt at the problem, setting the details up against the conceptual framework of the manuscripts themselves, and viewing each manuscript against the backdrop of as much as I can determine about its time and place of composition, and the influences—both textual and iconographic—upon it.

Ultimately, I may have egregiously misunderstood some, or even much, of the iconography. But consider the alternative: that creeping interpretive paralysis that relegates to the dustbin subject matter, monuments, and texts concerning which the “last word” has been said. The magnificent books with which I have spent many a pleasant and profitable hour do not deserve such a fate. Having made some rather bold and novel iconographic observations, I feel the responsibility to share them in order to receive critiques of them. As a result of my own experimental forays onto iconographic ground both firm and uncertain, I hope that other scholars will feel more confident about engaging this fascinating material more deeply. I transparently acknowledge that this work is a construct, and that it is, moreover, my particular construct, bearing, as such, no claim of unique accuracy or authority. So, while I am convinced that my theoretical reconstruction is as good as anyone else’s, the corollary is also true. I imagine that there are now, or shortly will be, other theories regarding the meaning of the individual iconographic motifs I have examined, and other speculations concerning how they fit together. It is my hope that in presenting my case with as much substantiation as I can muster, others with different contextual information, or with more expertise in specific areas—midrash, Jewish-Christian relations, iconographic motif-sourcing—will step in with their own interpretations. That, for me, is what scholarly dialectic is ultimately all about.

As I conclude this volume, I am both delighted by how far the field of medieval Jewish visual culture has come in the past decade, and frustrated that so many unanswered questions still remain—questions that may never be answered. The thorniest problem in this whole enterprise—because it requires provenance information that continues to be unavailable to me or anyone else—is to place the manuscripts I have examined in their exact historical context. As of this writing, scholars cannot link iconographic

developments in the Birds' Head Haggadah, for example, with any greater certainty or specificity to events in Mainz in 1300 than could Schapiro in his historical essay for the 1967 facsimile for the simple reason that no one can yet prove that the book was illuminated in Mainz in 1300. So one is still relegated to speaking broadly about its context as early fourteenth-century Ashkenaz. Katrin Kogman-Appel's work has demonstrated just how far one can go with the available information, zeroing in with considerably more precision than previous scholars on an intellectual context (hence a social, hence a historical context) for the Spanish material. But definitive information regarding the specific historical microcontext—the sort of very localized knowledge so crucial to the analysis of historians like Elukin—remains elusive.

Historians of Jewish visual culture have made unprecedented strides in terms of identifying iconographic sources and in ascribing manuscripts to more specific social strata of designers and audience. But I want to know more. I want to know things that I will never be able to know with certainty without (as a student once exclaimed to me, in frustration lightly tinged with awe) living in an alternate universe, or, at the very least, building a time machine. Researchers have made great progress in perceiving the outlines of the types of people who constituted the authorships and the audiences of these works. But I still want to know who the individuals were and what particular agenda—on a microhistorical level—was involved in the creation of each manuscript.

What was the societal context for the Birds' Head Haggadah? Were the griffin heads the result of a very learned, possibly mystical context? Or a very simple combination of leonine and aquiline attributes that would have been easily apprehended by any Jewish child who could have opened up *Pirkei Avot* and read the very first *mishnah*, where Jews are enjoined to engage the power of lions and the swiftness of eagles to do God's will? It makes a tremendous difference in terms of how one perceives the society that created the iconography and how one understands it to have been viewed.

Was the Golden Haggadah illuminated for a woman, and had she, indeed, lost a child? What was the experience of the authorship of BL Or. 1404 that led it to be careful, cautious, and quietistic in depicting the sufferings of the Egyptians and the salvation of the Israelites? What went through the heads of the designers of the Rylands Haggadah when they looked at BL Or. 1404? Did they find it too conservative and obsequious? What experiences had they or their community gone through that pushed them to amplify its vengefulness and compound its militarism? And what, really, was each authorship actually thinking when it co-opted the *Flight into Egypt* motif? Was each aware of the centrality of the theme in Christian lore and art, and if not, does my whole theory about the significance of the motif collapse? What was the relationship among patron, rabbinic adviser, artist, and audience? Why did the authorship of BL Or. 1404 and the Rylands

Haggadah choose not to engage a rabbinic adviser, and why did the authorship of the Golden Haggadah choose to do so (if this, in fact, was the case)? And how exactly did the presence or absence of such an adviser influence the program?

It is my hope that some of these questions will be addressed and answered in the future by readers of this volume, partisans and critics alike. And I welcome their responses. If the letter of the law concerning the eve of the seder is that “you shall tell your child [of the Exodus],” and the spirit of the commandment is “everyone who expands upon the telling of the Exodus from Egypt, is indeed praiseworthy,” it is, in fact, the illustrations as commentary that facilitate the fulfillment of both letter and spirit of the commandment of *sippur yezi’at Mizrayim*. Small wonder that the colophon of an illuminated haggadah created by Avraham of Ihringen of Germany in 1732 paraphrases the haggadah’s mandate, asserting that “everyone who expands upon the scribal illumination and the illustration of the Exodus from Egypt is indeed both praiseworthy and superb!”²¹

The present work has been an extended meditation on the ways in which the images that emerge from this sort of cultural negotiation reflect the consciousness of their creators in their particular context. Medieval Jewish visual culture is both deeply embedded within a holistic traditional Jewish culture and part of the wider stream of medieval culture. Although stylistically they fit within the aesthetic parameters of the wider artistic ethos of their period and place, far from being mere imitators of surrounding trends, the authorship of Jewish illuminated manuscripts in the Middle Ages worked concertedly to adapt majority iconography to Jewish purposes. They did so in ways that demonstrate a masterly fluency in the modes of the general culture and an ability to read these elements through the filter of specifically Jewish consciousness.

The hunger, the urgency, the desire to know these works intimately is best understood when holding them in one’s hands in the great libraries and collections in which they now reside. When one is privileged to do this, one feels (as one does in viewing the Moss Haggadah) as if one has come face to face with someone from history, so like us and yet so utterly different and distant. It helps at those moments to recall the image of the Divine Word-as-Tabernacle from the Duke of Sussex’s German Pentateuch (plate 1) and to understand that where word and image converge, and iconography serves as exegesis, each speaks for and interprets the other, and both contain within themselves an echo of eternity.

Introduction

- 1 Goldschmidt 1969, 125.
- 2 Yerushalmi 2005, xxiv ff.
- 3 Moss Haggadah, Collection of Richard and Beatrice Levy, Florida, folios 28b and 29a. See Moss 1990.
- 4 Classic surveys of the question of Jewish art in light of the Second Commandment include Urbach 1959 and Gutmann 1961 (reprinted in Gutmann 1970). See also B. Cohen 1954; Schwarzschild 1975; Roth 1956; Baumgarten 1974; Gordis and Davidowitz 1975; and Heimann-Jelinek 2003. On the philosophical implications of aniconism, see Halbertal and Margalit 1998 and Bland 2001. Reappraisals of the implications of iconoclasm include Stern 1996; Fine 2000, 2005; and Levine 2000, 2005. On relevant texts, see Mann 2000.
- 5 “The term ‘interpictoriality’ is offered here . . . by analogy to a literary phenomenon . . . The notion of intertextuality asserts that readers respond to textual references and cues by bringing previously read texts [in the case of the haggadah, also oral exegesis] to bear on current acts of reading. This activity may implicate connotations, innuendoes, even arguments” (Hahn 1999, 109). Concerning the Spanish haggadot Kogman-Appel 2006, 52, concludes that while the cycles of illumination relate to one another more loosely or more tightly, “none of the cycles under consideration here is a faithful copy of any other cycle, whether Jewish or Christian.” Certainly the question of “literalism” and “accuracy” in illustration can, by this point, be put to rest: In medieval haggadot, illustrations sometimes reference the actual haggadah text; they only occasionally illustrate it, and they rarely do so in a way that could be construed as literal. Since illustration, then, is rarely, if ever, literal, illuminations cannot be viewed as snapshots of “Jewish life in the Middle Ages” but should rather be understood to re-present it through a particular lens. In seventeenth-century printed haggadot this changes somewhat, but one should still be wary of reading realia into the self-presentation of Jews depicting themselves in art. See Epstein 2001.
- 6 For a fuller exposition of this chronology, see Kogman-Appel 2006, 2.
- 7 Narkiss 1997, 11.
- 8 On the “parting of the ways” (or the lack thereof) between rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity, see Boyarin 1997, 1999, 2006 and Becker and Reed

2003. On the relationship between Jewish and general medieval culture, see Jordan 2000; Marcus 2002; Skinner 2003; and Sapir 1998. For the early modern period, see Bell 2000. On the boundaries of medieval Jewish-Christian symbiosis, see Marcus 1996 and Yuval 2006 and Elukin 2007. On violence, see Nirenberg 1996. My own work has attempted to apply these developments to the field of visual culture: Epstein 1997.
- 9 On the early Middle Ages, see Cohen 2000 and Chazelle 2001. On the High Middle Ages, see Alexander 1993 and Camille 1989, 1992, 1998. On the transmission of exegetical motifs from antiquity to the Middle Ages, see Verkerk 2004. On iconography as manifestation of exegesis with a particular theological thrust, see Lowden 2002; Lewis 1995, 1998; A. Cohen 2000; Kessler 1989; Lipton 2002, 1999; Verkerk 2004; Hassig 1995, 2000; Strickland 2003. Examples of the new manuscript studies are included in Hourihane 2007a, 2007b, 2006, 2002, 1999; Hourihane and Plummer 2005; and Sears and Thomas 2002. On gender in medieval history, see Bynum 1984, 1988, in art, see Beach 2004; Edwards and Ziegler 1995; Raguin and Stanbury 2005; Suydam and Ziegler 1999; Hamburger 1997; Bennett 1999; and Stones 1999. Recent studies of women in medieval Jewish history that contain information that may be profitably applied to the field of Jewish art include Grossman 2005 and Baumgarten 2004.
- 10 On Jewish visual culture in early modernity and modernity, see R. Cohen 1998; Soussloff 1999; Bland 2001; Olin 2001; and Baigell and Heyd 2001. On the history of Jewish art in premodernity, see Frojmovic 2002a; Batterman 2004; and Olin 2000 (see also Olin 2001, 127–156). Eva Frojmovic, Michael Batterman, Julie Harris, Sarit Shalev-Eyni, and Katrin Kogman-Appel have all offered highly nuanced and contextual evaluations of medieval Jewish manuscripts. Scholarly journals on Jewish art include *Jewish Art* (published by the Center for Jewish Art in Jerusalem since 1974; from 1974 to 1985 it was the *Journal of Jewish Art*), *Rimonim* (Center for Jewish Art, intermittent, 1983–99), *Ars Judaica* (Bar Ilan University since 2005), and *IMAGES: A Journal of Jewish Art and Visual Culture* (Leiden, Brill, since 2007).
- 11 Examples of the New Art History include Brunette and Wills 1993; Bryson 1988; Cheetham et al. 1998; Duncan 1993; Gilbert-Rolfe 1995; Jonathan Harris 2001; Haynes 1996; Holliday 1993;

Notes

Hebrew Bible quotations and the spelling of biblical names are from Tanakh: *A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1985), unless otherwise noted. All other translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

- Rees and Borzello 1986. On the New Medievalism, see Brownlee et al. 1991. On the New Philology, see Busby 1993. On the *Annales* school, see Burke 1991; Clark 1999; Dosse 1994. On narratology, see Brilliant 1984, 2000, 2004. For reception theory, see Camille 1989, 1992, 1998. On iconography as “text,” see Lewis 1995, 1998. For Koerner’s micro-contextualism, see Koerner 1997, 2004a, 2004b, 2007.
- 12 Because, in most cases, it cannot be determined whether the direction for particular details or treatment of iconography came from the patrons, the artists, or—most likely—a collaboration between the two, I will refer throughout this work to the patronage/design/execution of a given manuscript as its “authorship,” following a terminology employed for literary works whose construction details are similarly occluded. Compare, for instance, the use of the phrase “authorship of the Zohar” in Liebes 1993, 85–138. Katrin Kogman-Appel prefers “designers” (Kogman-Appel 2006, 12), but I feel that the word “designer,” with its often purely visual associations, underplays the great engagement of the authorship with textual ideas.
- 13 See Suckale 1988. On patron-artist relations in Ashkenaz, see Frojmovic 2008 and Shalev-Eyni 2007.
- 14 When I examine motifs on Polish synagogue ceilings I am always acutely conscious that even as I interpret a hare hunt as an allegory for the persecution of Israel by the nations, in *that* particular venue, *that* specific hare may have been depicted as being attacked by an eagle for a reason involving contextual realities utterly unknown to me. Perhaps the artist or patron was named Haas (hare) and was involved in a personal conflict with a landlord (*porez/perez* [eagle/vulture]). But I could never confirm or deny such a speculation; the information on which it is based is undocumented and well-nigh unrecoverable except in extraordinary cases.
- 15 While exact provenance remains unknown, increasingly tighter circles can be drawn on the basis of such elements as the use of midrashic details in the iconography. Compare, for example, Narkiss 1970, Narkiss et al. 1982, 13–15, Batterman 2000 (critiqued by Kogman-Appel 2006, 189), and Kogman-Appel 2006, 212, for a progressive development of understanding in terms of the authorship context of the Spanish haggadot.
- 16 On narratology, and text as exegesis, see Mitchell 1987 and Bal and Bryson 1991. On medieval and early Renaissance contexts, see Schapiro 1996; Brilliant 1991; Camille 1985a, 1985b; Duggan 1989; Iversen 1990; Kessler 1989; and Lubbock 2006.
- 17 Verkerk 1999, 71.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 73.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 81.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 73–74.
- 21 Camille 1989, 162.
- 22 Jolly 1997, 5.
- 23 Hahn 1999, 109.
- 24 Kogman-Appel 2006 demonstrates, *pace* Batterman 2002, that the Sephardic haggadot are nonkabbalistic. The Birds’ Head Haggadah displays little that I perceive as kabbalistic (though scholars of kabbalah have yet to consider it and the other Ashkenazic illuminated manuscripts). It seems likely to me that it was created for a patron who probably lived within a moderate pietistic context, possibly someone who supported the aims of the pietists and financed them, though not him or herself a kabbalist.
- 25 Pamela King (2008) describes “kinetic definitions of the perception process” as “help[ing] to refine further our understanding of how the audience views in the visually rich world of the festive event.” King’s formulation makes it clear that the most apposite parallels to the enactment of the haggadah at the seder are such publicly performed liturgical pageants and processions.
- 26 Freedberg 1991, and see Koerner 2004a.
- 27 *Barait’a de-melekheth ha-mishkan* 14:16–20 further distances the divine voice from the *kruvim*, localizing it “from within” then “from next to” the Incense Altar, and finally “from next to” the Sacrificial Altar. See *Barait’a de-melekheth ha-mishkan* 1992: 219, 244.
- 28 Epstein 1997, 88.
- 29 This view is changing in light of new research on the response of Jews to Christian pilgrimage in the Middle Ages; see Shoham-Steiner 2006.

1. Birds’ Head Revisited

- 1 There are, in addition, a few other motifs, some implicitly and others explicitly eschatological. In my description and dating of the manuscript I am indebted to Spitzer 1965, particularly the essays by H. L. C. Jaffé and Bezalel Narkiss. For an insightful treatment of the phenomenon of the birds’ heads in the sociohistorical context of the manuscript, see Schapiro in Spitzer 1965, 15–19, reprinted as Schapiro 1979a. A more recent publication is the edition published as part of the series comprising the *Index of Jewish Art*. See Narkiss and Sed-Rajna 1976.
- 2 Ameisenowa 1949; Mynott 2009.
- 3 On the historical context of medieval Mainz, see Yuval 2006, 104, 130, 132, 144–145, 148, 149 n. 33, 153, 157, 161–162, 171, 172. For material culture and archaeological evidence in Speyer, see Castano et al. 2005, 59–90, 99–105, 124–260. On Jewry law in fourteenth-century Germany, see Lotter 1989. On

the Jews' status as "slaves" in the sense of Roman law, see Lotter 2002, 292, and Linder 2002, 1997, 1987.

Jaffé's enumeration and delineation of the illuminations in Spitzer 1965, 31–88, is primarily descriptive—it is left to Narkiss to analyze iconographic significance, and thus it is he who expresses consternation at the inconsistencies of the illumination (Spitzer 1965, 90–94ff.).

Two important recent studies of the "afterlife" of iconic images and what scholarship on them says about the scholars themselves are Camille 2009 and Steinberg 2001.

- 4 A *genizah* is a room, usually in a synagogue, where old manuscripts that are no longer usable, but which contain the divine name in Hebrew, are stored to await burial. Once something goes into the *genizah* it is not seen again (unless the *genizah* is unearthed in an archaeological investigation).
- 5 The tendency has been to conclude that the viewers of the manuscript who authored these annotations "interpret the pictures wrongly" (Spitzer 1965, 27, 34, 40, 94). If this is the case, then the captions and annotations are not valuable for those who are searching to reconstruct the conception as it originated in the minds of the authorship. But if one is interested in the manuscript's reception by its various audiences over time, attention to the captions and annotations is essential.

An interesting example of an annotation that affords a glimpse into the way the manuscript was used at least at some points in its history is a marginal interpolation in the *kiddush* on folio 2v. *Kiddush* is the prayer of sanctification for the three Pilgrimage Festivals in which the body text is consistent with only the appellations of the holidays changing. The later annotator has added the words *Ḥag Ha-Sukkot*—Festival of *Sukkot*.

Although these words were unnoted by Goldschmidt in his article about textual variants in the manuscript (Spitzer 1965, 112), through them one can reconstruct a receptive context for the manuscript and observe it, as it were, in use. Though it goes without saying that for its earliest users the manuscript was more a utilitarian haggadah than an "art treasure," the annotation makes it clear that for at least one of its users it wasn't even primarily a haggadah but perhaps the only volume of liturgical text in the household. Thus, while it may be technically correct that the manuscript was "designed for use at a single feast only" (Spitzer 1965, 93), it seems that the owners would have pressed it into service for recitation of *kiddush* not only on Passover but during *Sukkot* as well. They may very well have made use of it in other ways and at other times. Perhaps it is necessary to

rethink the whole idea of what manuscripts were "designed for" if they were actually *used* for purposes other than their obvious primary function. When a Passover haggadah was the only manuscript one owned, one might have deployed it in a variety of circumstances.

- 6 For a list of the major Ashkenazic Jewish manuscripts that distort the human countenance in various ways (among them zoocephalic and avicephalic distortion), see Mellinkoff 1999, 59.
- 7 Ameisenowa 1949.
- 8 H. C. L. Jaffé, "The Illustrations," Spitzer 1965, 31–88; Meyer Schapiro, "Introduction," Spitzer 1965, 15–19; Narkiss 1983.
- 9 Strauss 1972, 58–61; Mellinkoff 1999. And see my review: Epstein 2002.
- 10 See Spitzer 1965, 35, 38, 43, 108. On 71, the issue is explored a bit more deeply.
- 11 Exod. 20:4; Deut. 5:8.
- 12 http://www.imj.org.il/eng/judaica/birdshead_Haggadah.html; Judah b. Samuel 1924: para. 1625; MaHaRaM, see *Tosafot* on BT *Yom'a* 54b; R. Ephraim's responsum is quoted within the responsum of R. Meir of Rothenberg. Meir b. Barukh 2003, 2: nos. 56, 50. See Spitzer 1965, 66–72.
- 13 Jaffé, in Spitzer 1965, 38; Mellinkoff 1999, 20, 25.
- 14 Schapiro, in Spitzer 1965, 17.
- 15 Roth 1969, 82–83; Schapiro, in Spitzer 1965, 17–18.
- 16 The idea that Datan and Aviram remained in Egypt is found in *Targum Yerushalmi* on Exod. 14:3, and it is made more explicit in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*. The source of this midrashic detail is likely *Midrash Sekhel Tov*; see also *Mahzor Vitry*, 1889, 22. Datan and Aviram were characters who underwent a considerable odyssey in rabbinic literature; see L. Ginzberg, et al. 2003, 488 n. 75. They would have been familiar to medieval Jews as the archetypal evil traitors via the text of the oath "according to the Jewish custom" (*more judaico*). See Marcus 1938, 49–50. In this oath, the punishment of Datan and Aviram is one of permanent separation from the community, an idea that seems to be contravened on halakhic grounds by the authorship of the Birds' Head Haggadah when it grants the pair features that link them with the other Jews in the manuscript in spite of their turning away from the community.
- 17 On the pigs' ears, see Mellinkoff 1999, 35. The ears are arguably as leonine as they are porcine, and they certainly conform to the appearance of the ears of griffins in medieval bestiaries. For comparison, see, in particular, the griffin that grasps a pig in its claws in Cambridge, University Library, MS li. 4.26, Bestiary, England, 1200–1210, fol. 6v (fig. 7), and note that the griffin's ears, though shaped somewhat similarly to those of the pig, are longer and narrower, and that the entire profile of

the griffin is very similar to those of the Jews in the Birds' Head Haggadah. Other roughly contemporary examples of griffins include the following in the central medieval display of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London: a reliquary made in Cologne c. 1180 (inv. 7650–1861), a Venetian textile imported to Germany between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries (inv. 1293–1864), and a gaming piece of ivory from Cologne, 1150–1175 (inv. 376–1871). Several depictions of the Senmurv, a Persian griffin, appear on import textiles from antiquity through the fourteenth century, occasioning comment in the exhibition text: “common on Sassanian and Byzantine textiles imported into Northwest Europe” (inv. 8579–1863, inv. 8579–1863).

Depictions of griffins in bestiaries also roughly contemporary with the Birds' Head Haggadah include London, British Library, Add. MS 24686, Alphonso Psalter, England, 1284, fol. 18r; London, British Library, Add. MS 42130, Lutterell Psalter, England (Lincoln), c. 1325–1335, fol. 160v; British Library, Harley MS 4751, Bestiary, England (Salisbury?), c. 1230–1240, fol. 7v; Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, MS Gl. kgl. S. 1633 4°, Bestiary of Ann Walsh, England, fifteenth century, fol. 8r; the Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS KB, 128 C 4, *Le Livre fleurissant en fleurs*, Enghien, 1512, fol. 91r; the Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS KB, 72 A 23, *Liber Floridus*, Lille and Ninove, 1460, fol. 46r; the Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS KB, 76 E 4, *Der Naturen Bloeme*, Flanders or Utrecht, c. 1450–1500, fol. 48v; the Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS KB, KA 16, *Der Naturen Bloeme*, Flanders, c. 1350, fol. 87r; and the Hague, Museum Meermanno, MS MMW, 10 B 25, Bestiary, France, c. 1450, fol. 5r. See also the misericords in Cartmel Priory, Cartmel England, late fourteenth century, and in Limerick Cathedral (St. Mary's), Limerick, Ireland, late fifteenth century (Bond 1910, 60–61).

Mellinkoff asserts that the profile is always a sign of infamy (Mellinkoff 1999, 19–21), which is arguable in the case of humans. But animals in medieval art are commonly represented in profile, and heraldic beasts, such as griffins, invariably so. Thus, while human heads in profile may carry negative symbolic valence, even “good” animals, the symbols of the Evangelists or the Lamb of God, are often represented in profile, and the commonplace in depiction may trump the negative valence of profilic representation.

18 See the sarcophagus of Caelia Omnina from a Jewish catacomb in Rome (Leon 1952).

19 Most sources indicate that the Ark (with its cover and the *kruvim*) was looted from Jerusalem before the building of the second Temple. See I Kings

14:25–26, 2 Chronicles 12:2–4, 9 (Shishak's sack of the Temple); 2 Kings 25:13–15 and 2 Chronicles 36:17–19 (Nebuchadnezzar's sack). See also 4 Ezra 10:19–22. In 2 Maccabees 2:4–6, Jeremiah is told to hide the Ark in a cave in Mount Nebo. 2 Baruch 6:5–9 describes an angel coming down from heaven into the Holy of Holies and taking the “mercy seat.” When the Temple is rebuilt after the Babylonian Exile, the inventory of restored vessels in Ezra 1:9–11 lists 5,400 items, but the Ark is not mentioned. Josephus's description of Herod's augmented and expanded Temple includes no mention of the Ark, only an empty Holy of Holies (*Jewish War*, 5:5; Thackeray 1957, 267). On God's voice speaking from between the *kruvim*, see Exod. 25:22.

Textual evidence for the idea that the *kruvim* had leonine bodies is slim. Ezek. 41:18–19 describes the *kruvim* as having two “faces” (*shna'im panim*, two faces, aspects, or sides), that of a human and that of a lion; see Albright 1961. But rabbinic (and later mystical) sources describe the faces and the embrace of the *kruvim* as human, cf. BT *Yom'a* 54a. Cultic images of the *kruvim* are mentioned in Exod. 25:19 and 37:8; 1 Kings 6:25–26; Ezek. 41:18; and 2 Chr. 3:11–12. The rabbinic idea that the *kruvim* on the *kapporet* had human faces seems to be derived from post facto Aramaic etymology. “R. 'Abbaḥu said: ‘[A *kruv* is thus named because it] resembles an infant [Aramaic: *ke-rabi'a*—“like an infant”], for in Babylon an infant is called ‘*rabi'a*’” (BT, *Sukkah* 5b). Rashi (R. Solomon b. Isaac, Troyes, France, 1040–1105, on Exod. 25:18) and Maimonides (*Guide* 3: 1) have assimilated this model, as their description of child-faced *kruvim* correlates with R. 'Abbaḥu's.
20 On the Tabernacle curtain, see JT *Shekalim* 8:3, where R. Judah and R. Neḥemiah disagree with regard to the meaning of two weaving techniques, *ma'aseh rokem* and *ma'aseh ḥoshev*, employed on the Tabernacle and Temple curtain: “[R. Judah] said: *ma'aseh rokem* means a lion on one side and a lion on the other; *ma'aseh ḥoshev* means a lion on one side and an empty space on the other. [R. Neḥemiah] said: *ma'aseh rokem* means a lion on one side and empty space on the other.” Rashi agrees with R. Neḥemiah in his commentary on Exodus 26:1, but he understands the obverse of the curtain not to have contained an empty space but an eagle: “One face on one side and one face on the other, a lion on one side and an eagle on the other.” Yaniv 1999 opines that this is the reason for the use of griffins on Torah Ark valences in the early modern period, but the association of lions/eagles/griffins/*kruvim* goes much farther back in time, to Byzantine-era synagogue mosaics, *pace* Sukenik 1932, 22–26, and to the gold glass of the Roman

period (see Barag 1973, pls. 1, 2, 4, 10). London, British Library, MS 15282, Duke of Sussex's German Pentateuch. Pentateuch with Megillot, southern Germany, c. 1300, fol. 137r (fig. 10), contemporary with our manuscript, depicts crowned lions and eagles (not melded as griffins) decorating what I believe to be the Tabernacle curtain as it appears on the page introducing the book of Leviticus.

In later Jewish iconography it retains its ancient association with the sun (see Goldman 1960) and is depicted in parallel with the sun in illuminated *maḥzorim*, as, for instance, when a cloven-hoofed, wingless griffin (also called an alce or a keythongand in later heraldry) accompanies the initial word for the *piyyut 'Ot Zeh Ha-Ḥodesh* (The sign of this month), for *Shabbat Ha-Ḥodesh* in the *Laud Maḥzor* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Or. 321, Germany, 1250–1260, fol. 57v, fig. 11); see Shalev-Eyni 1998. Later, it appears on the ceiling or flanking the eastern oculus (which represented the sun) in European synagogues. See, for instance, the synagogue of Horb, southern Germany, painted in 1755 by Eliezer Zusman Katz and now in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, and that of Sandomierz (Poland, nineteenth-twentieth centuries, fig. 12), among very many other examples. On lions/eagles/griffins/*kruvim* in European synagogue accoutrements, see Yaniv 1999. Some late manuscripts of *Perek Shirah* include the depiction of a griffin accompanying the text of the song of the *zarzir*, more likely a sparrow or starling, and in one case (*zarzir matna'im*) possibly a greyhound or other canine. On the text and history of *Perek Shirah*, see *Perek Shirah* 1966. In all cases, the form and physical situation of these beasts is heraldic, but their function can vary from decorative to symbolic to allegorical. If they appear in connection with an eastern oculus, their symbolic valence is clear. When they illustrate a text that is intended to describe the manner in which “everything that has breath praises God” (Ps. 150) they may be viewed as allegorical. When they appear on synagogue ceilings or in the margins of manuscripts with other flora and fauna they may be decorative, but they may also bear symbolic or allegorical meanings that cannot readily be determined.

- 21 Oxen were represented in the First Temple in the form of “Solomon’s Sea,” a great bronze construction consisting of a basin borne on the backs of twelve oxen (1 Kings 7:44). This feature was conspicuously absent in the Second Temple, perhaps because the Jews felt the burden of their sins as a result of their experience during the Babylonian exile—“Because of our sins we were exiled from our Land” (Festival Liturgy, *Mussaf*; see Frenkel and Goldschmidt 1992, 203)—and did not wish to

be reminded of the Golden Calf. For the most comprehensive study of the bearers of the Divine Chariot, see Halperin 1988.

- 22 The literature of *Ḥassidei 'Ashkenaz* is replete with microcosm/macrocasm correspondence (*kol mah she-bar'a ba'olam bar'a ba'-adam*) deriving mainly from midrash and commentaries on *Sefer Yeẓirah*. See Judah b. Samuel 2006, notes 538–540. In *Zohar Va-'ethanan* 262b Rabbi Simeon b. Lakish makes the equivalence between the figures bearing the Chariot and the patriarchs: the man being Abraham; the lion, Isaac; the ox, Jacob; and the eagle King David.
- 23 For the eagle as an imperial symbol, see plate 15, fig. 5, and Schapiro in Spitzer 1965, 17.
- 24 On the eagle as representing divine protection and salvation, see Deut. 32:11, evoking Exod. 19:4. On the eagle as a metaphor for renewal, see Isa. 40:31. The lion is the biblical metaphor of choice for Judah, the leader of the tribes; cf. Gen. 49:9. Rashi writes that “the Community of Israel is likened to a lioness” (Rashi on BT *Sotah* 11b). In rabbinic literature, Israel’s assiduousness at prayer is compared to the “lightness” of an eagle and the “boldness” of the lion. See *Mishnah 'Avot* 5:20, paraphrased by Jacob b. Asher (Spain, c. 1270–1343) as the opening rubric for his *'Arba'ah Turim* (*Tur*), the great code of Jewish law. Joseph Karo (Toledo, 1488–Safed, 1575) maintains and elaborates upon this rubric in the opening lines of his *Shulḥan 'Arukh*, the classic sixteenth-century abbreviation of the *Tur* (Karo 1884, 2). For lions and eagles representing the martyred Jews of Mainz, see Rosenfeld 1965, 133.
- 25 On the contingency of angels, see Braude 1968, *Pisk'a* 40, 702. See also, for example, Abraham 'Ibn 'Ezra (Spain, 1092 or 1093–1167) on Ps. 119:89–96. On their ephemeral nature, see *Genesis Rabbah* 78:1. On their ability to perform only a single task at a time, see Rashi on Gen. 18:2, quoting *Genesis Rabbah* 40:2b. On the unvarying application of the celestial bodies to their specific tasks in the divine *oiconome*, see “Blessing of the New Moon” (*Siddur*, Ashkenazic 2009, 716).
- 26 The fear of the veneration of celestial forces is based on the more primal fear inherent in any prohibition of “idolatry”: the fear that angelic and planetary power may somehow challenge or threaten divine power; see Epstein 1997, 70–95. On angelology and astrology in medieval Jewish culture, see D. Schwartz 1999. See also Trachtenberg 1939, Swartz 1996, and the more popular Shir 1998. On the nullification of idolatrous images, see *Mishnah 'Avodah Zarah* 4 and BT *'Avodah Zarah* 52b–53b; and Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry, chap. 8, secs. 8 and 10.

- 27 BT *Avodah Zarah* 53a.
- 28 Goldschmidt 1969, 122.
- 29 Jer. 10:25, as included in the text of *Shfokh Hamatkhah* (Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 30r). Goldschmidt 1969, 130.
- 30 Goldschmidt 1969, 131. See also the magical use of Exod. 15:16 in recombination in the "Blessing of the New Moon" (*Siddur*, Ashkenazic 2009, 716).
- Although the classical rabbinic designation of non-Jews as *'ovdei 'avodah zarah* (idolaters) would not at first glance seem to be significantly mitigated by the eventual use of the acronym *'AKuM* as a euphemism replacing it—the worship of celestial bodies being no better than the worship of idols—in fact, medieval Jews did not believe that Christians literally worshipped the sun, moon, and stars. The eventual use of the acronym *'AKuM* appears in writing relatively late, in the works of the ReMA (Rabbi Moses Isserles, Poland, 1530–1572), but it was likely in oral circulation before that time. It should not be understood as an indictment of non-Jews for outright idolatry, but rather for believing in the power of fate rather than trusting in divine providence. This represents an intermediate stance between rabbinic conceptualization of non-Jews as idolaters and the eventual designation of them as "people bounded by the ways of religion" by R. Menahem b. Solomon HaMeiri (Provence, 1249–1315) in his commentary *Beit Ha-Beḥirah*. See R. Menahem b. Solomon Meiri 1944, 26a; 1961, 37b; 1943, 62b, among many other loci.
- 31 On effacement as iconoclasm in late medieval (and postmodern) culture, see Groebner 2008. On image "erasure" in Protestantism, see Koerner 2004b.
- 32 Goldschmidt 1969, 120.

2. Socioreligious Stratification

- 1 Lateran IV's imposition of distinguishing "Jewish" marks makes sense in the context of the golden locks of all the Jewish figures shown with hair in the manuscript. Even in these depictions of Jews intended for internal consumption, and even when they are given a set of features that marks them as definitively different, a desire to represent the essential physical commonality of Jews with the majority population continues to be troped in the blondness of their hair.
- 2 One servant is represented with a closely fitted cap (folio 7v), but none is equipped with a *Judenhut*. The servant with the cap has a ducklike bill in place of the standard eagle beak, perhaps a comment on the fact that this servant, though a Jew, is "domestic" (like a duck), rather than free (like an eagle).

A third group of bareheaded figures appears

bearing unbaked *mazah* dough on poles (plate 16). These were identified as women by Jaffé and Narkiss (Spitzer 1965, 39), presumably on the basis of their hatlessness, but it also may have had to do with the fact that women are distinctly shown in the next scene, which depicts contemporary *mazah* baking (plates 17, 18). However, although these ostensible women do wear the hat typical of males in the manuscript, they also lack the head coverings common to all the other women in this work, and at least one figure, shown in the center, is depicted with a shock of blond hair at the back of the head. No woman is shown with exposed hair in the manuscript.

Since the figures number six and are led by Moses, they may be a short-hand depiction of the six hundred thousand who left Egypt in Exod. 12:37, in the same way that the six figures depicted descending into Egypt are intended to represent the totality of the Israelites (twelve tribes, even though Joseph is already in Egypt; plate 4). Perhaps their hatlessness is meant to signify that they are young people, the figures being a play on the words *bnei Yisra'el*, the "children" of Israel. But if so, why are they depicted bareheaded here, and not, for instance, in the scene of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds (plate 11)?

It is more likely that this illumination is based on Onkelos's paraphrase of Exod. 14:8, "And the Children of Israel went out with a high hand," where he translates *yad ramah* ("with a high hand") as *be-resh galut'a* ("with bare heads"), reflecting a Greco-Roman cultural climate in which freemen went bareheaded (which, in turn, is echoed in the more contemporary gesture of taking one's hat off and waving it in the air as a sign of rejoicing in one's freedom). See London, British Library, Add. MS 27210, Catalonia, 1320–1330, fol. 14v (plate 39, top left). If this is the case, there is an interesting contrast between the illumination on this page and the one on the facing page, which depicts the bareheaded Datan and Aviram (figs. 6, 22; plate 15). Among the Israelites here, bareheadedness (as opposed to the depiction of their labors as slaves [plate 6]) signifies freedom, and is only momentary; by the next scene, they have regained their hats, whereas in the case of Datan and Aviram, bareheadedness signifies that they have gone over to an alien culture.

- 3 On the *Judenhut* as a sign of infamy, see Mellinkoff 1993, 1999, and Shreckenber 1996, passim. See Jesus' *Judenhut* in the depiction of the Supper at Emmaus (Lk. 24:13–32) in the so-called St. Louis Psalter (Leiden, University Library, B.P.L. MS 76A, north English, 1190–1200, fol. 27) as shown in Blumenkranz 1966, 77, pl. 98. For other examples of Jesus wearing a Jewish hat, see Schreckenber

- 1996, 141–143, Bachmann 2003, Stephani 2005.
- 4 Lateran IV, 1215: Canon 68 (“On Jews”). See Schroeder 1937, 78–127. The best recent discussion of and summary of the literature concerning the *Judenhut* is Lipton 1999, 15–19 and notes. See also N. Roth 2002, 173–174. For examples in art, see Mellinkoff 1993, 57–94, relevant plates and *passim*.
 - 5 Spitzer 1965, 49–57, esp. 54–55.
 - 6 The freshly liberated Israelites, as noted, are another example (plate 16). But they are a special case, and their hatlessness (a result of application to a grammatical comment on the text of Exod. 14:8) responds to a *topos* of freedom rather than one of marginality.
 - 7 Gen. 40:15, 42:7.
 - 8 For contemporary *realia* that often entered written medieval biblical commentary, see RaShI on Gen. 1:1, wherein he seeks to reassure Jews that the outcome of Christian-Muslim conflict over the Holy Land was immaterial to their own religious aspirations. See also Walfish, 1993.
 - 9 Joseph’s beatification most famously resets on his resisting the overtures of Potiphar’s wife. See Kasher 1927, “*Va-Yeshev*,” 1489–1490; compare *Quran* 12:23–29 and *Pesikt’a DeRav Kahanah*, S3 (Braude and Kapstein 2002, 635).

One would think that such a righteous man would be concerned with preserving his identity as an Israelite, even in service to Pharaoh. But in the text (Gen. 41:42–43, 45), Joseph seems to rather willingly accommodate himself to the honors Pharaoh bestows upon him, all designed to obviate his Israelite identity in one way or another. Pharaoh changes Joseph’s clothing and its ornamentation, gives him a royal means of transportation, and makes a public proclamation regarding his status (compare Est. 6:8–9, and the case of Mordekhai). But he also changes Joseph’s name and gives him a (non-Israelite) wife.

Leviticus Rabbah 32:5 asserts: “R. Huna said in the name of R. Kappara: Because of four things were the Jewish people redeemed from Egypt: They did not change their names, they did not change their language, they did not speak badly of one another, and there was not found among them an individual who engaged in sexual immorality.” How does Joseph fare by this standard? He had already brought bad reports of his brothers to their father (Gen. 37:2), certainly a violation of the idea that the Israelites did not speak badly of one another. When he acquiesces to Pharaoh changing his name, when he clearly speaks Egyptian (Gen. 42:23), and when he takes a foreign wife—the ultimate sexual temptation and transgression in the Patriarchal family (Gen. 28:1, 6) in the desert wanderings of the Israelites (Num. 25), after the Conquest (Judg. 14:3), and in exile (Ezra

10:1–4)—he completes the quadrivium of sins said to impede redemption.

Contrascripturally, exegetical literature bends over backward as it stretches to preserve Joseph’s righteousness. Two examples will suffice: biblical commentators are about equally divided on whether the name given Joseph by Pharaoh, “Zaphnat-p’ane’ah” in Gen. 41:45 is a Hebrew or an Egyptian one. Advocates of a Hebrew origin include the *Targumim* (Aramaic paraphrases and translations); among the medievals, RaShI, Nahmanides (R. Moses b. Nahman, Catalonia, Spain, 1194–c. 1270), and Ibn Kaspi (Joseph b. Abba Mari b. Joseph b. Jacob Caspi, Provence, 1297–1340). Rashbam (Samuel b. Meir, France, c. 1085–c. 1158), Bekhor Shor (Joseph b. Isaac Bekhor Shor of Orleans, twelfth century), and Abarbanel (Isaac b. Judah Abarbanel, Spain, 1437–1508) see it as Egyptian. Both contentions can be brought to bolster the idea of Joseph’s righteousness. If it is an Egyptian name, then it was given by divine providence and served to conceal Joseph’s identity from his brothers. If it were Hebrew, then (according to the Nahmanides) it would signal Joseph’s acceptance as *karov le-malkhut*, in spite of his Israelite origins. The *Da’at Zekeinim Mi-Ba’alei Tosafot* (a collection of tosafist exegesis in the order of the Pentateuch) on this verse reads the name as an acronym and makes Joseph come out looking golden in the process: “Zaddik Pitpeit Negged Ta’avato—Potiphar Ina Nafsho H’inam”—a righteous person struggles against his desires; Potiphar afflicted him causelessly. *Ba’al Ha-Turim* sees the name as numerically equivalent to “*megaleh nistarim*”; revealer of secrets (when the word *nistarim* is written *hasser*—that is, without a *vav*). Whatever the case, it is in no commentator’s eyes a simple assimilation of a foreign name as it seems to be in the text.

What about Joseph’s foreign wife? Again, the commentators indulge in unprecedented gymnastics: if Potiphar and Poti-phera are one and the same, and if the reference to this man as a *sariss* (eunuch) suggests castration or impotence (rather than “servant” or “courtier”), Asenath must be adopted. But who is she? She is the daughter of Joseph’s sister Dina, conceived when she was raped by Shekhem, and somehow having found her way to Egypt where she was adopted by Potiphar/Poti-phera. So, rather than being foreign, she is as associated with family as she can be. See Charlesworth 1985. For further literary analysis, see Kugel 1994. For Sephardic expansions, see McGaha 1997.

- 10 Though it is found in contemporary sources (cf. Rashi on BT *Hullin*, 92a), I use the term *karov/krovim le-malkhut* tentatively, as one would have to know more regarding the specific situation in

Mainz in 1300 to assert that such people could have been known to the authorship of the manuscript. However, theoretical considerations of this “type” are found in the halakhic literature (BT *Bav’a Kammi’a* 83a, BT *Sotah* 49b). Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Avodah Zarah*, 11:3, states: “If a Jew who is close to (involved with) the government [*karov le-malkhut*], and must sit before their kings, and mockery would accrue to him if he did not appear like them, he is permitted to dress as they dress, to shave himself close as they do.”

One also finds hints of the contemporary dilemma vis-à-vis this type of figure both in Sepharad and Ashkenaz, particularly in the expansion, interpretation, and discussion of the Joseph and Esther stories. On the Ashkenazic side of the equation, there is Rashi’s exegesis of a talmudic passage interpreting the last verse of the book of Esther (10:3): “For Mordekhai the Jew ranked next to [*mishneh le-*] King Ahasuerus and was highly regarded by the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brethren; he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his kindred: ‘Popular with the multitude of his brethren’: with the multitude, but not with all of his brethren, some of the Sanhedrin having turned away from him” (BT *Megillah* 16b). Rashi: “This indicates that some of the Sanhedrin shunned him because he became close to the monarchy [*karov le-malkhut*] and he neglected his learning.” R. Eleazar of Worms, author of the *Rokeaḥ* (c. 1165–c. 1230), writes on Esther 10:1: “It was because of the fact that Mordekhai did not tax the righteous, but rather only the fools” (since the verse states that “King Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the mainland and the islands,” and the final letters of the words “on the mainland and the islands—‘*al ha-arez ve-’iyei ha-yam*’ spell the word *l-[ei]-z-im*, fools), that he was “popular with the multitude, but not with all of his brethren—that is, with the righteous and not with the fools.” These two messages from Ashkenaz in the century before the creation of the Birds’ Head Haggadah differ somewhat from Maimonides’ permission for the *karov le-malkhut* to dress and shave like the gentile members of the court. Rashi stresses the potentially problematic nature of the position. It might lead to the neglect of learning even in a character as great as Mordekhai, let alone in the case of the average Jew. The *Ba’al HaRokeaḥ* takes a different tack: if Jews (in his case, the pietists) can get “their man” in government, he will benefit them particularly.

The people who may have been familiar to these authors as well as to the authorship of the Birds’ Head Haggadah were not “Court Jews” like those

who served monarchs in the age of absolutism, but rather—as far as can be determined—people who attached themselves to the court in a less official capacity. Although the context is very different, a number of the issues appertaining to such positions (for example, how to maintain observance while at court) were presumably the same for the earlier period. See the following works, which, naturally, focus on the later periods, for which there is more documentation: S. Stern 1950; Mann et al. 1996 and Hödl et al. 2004; Ries and Battenberg 2002; Schubert 1991; Wassmuth 2005.

11 On the efficacy in terms of group cohesion—and, ultimately, for redemption—of the conservatism ascribed to the Israelites with regard to not changing their names or their language, and their punctiliousness regarding the laws of respect in speech and sexual propriety, see *Leviticus Rabbah* 32:5; *Numbers Rabbah* 20:22; *Song of Songs Rabbah* 4:12; *Tanḥum’a, Balak* 16; *Mekhilt’a* on Exod. 12:6 (*B’o*, par. 5); Kasher 1927, 8:9, n. 26.

The question of whether the Israelites were also conservative in their manner of dress is the part of this list that is notoriously elusive (particularly since the Maimonides, loc cit., seems to permit adopting dress for political purposes). This addition to the list of maintaining Hebrew names, speaking Hebrew language, avoiding improper speech, and sexual temperance from *Leviticus Rabbah* 32:5 is generally ascribed to “the Sages” or “the Midrash” without direct citation. Some have maintained that it first appears in the ethical will of the *Ḥatam Sofer* (R. Moses Sofer, 1762–1839; see Riemer and Stampfer 1983, 19), but this seems late. *Sefer Moshav Zekeinim*, a compendium of Tosafist exegesis, includes it in the list apropos Exod. 1:1 (*Moshav Zekeinim*, 1959). It is certainly included in the list concerning that verse in Abarbanel, 1557. R. Samuel Jaffé Ashkenazi (Turkey, 1525–1595) cites its next appearance, in Levita’s *Meturgaman* (Ashkenazi 2001 621ff; Levita 1545). See also *Midrash Lekah Tov* on Exod. 6:6; Kasher 1927, 8: addenda chap. 3, 239.

12 The issue of Jewish “serfdom” is a fraught one. For the best survey of the problem, see Langmuir 1990. Here I am merely referring to the internal perception on the part of Jews that their experience in the Middle Ages was one of *shi’abud malkhuyot*: enslavement to the gentile kingdoms (BT *Berakhot* 34b, *Shabbat* 151b, *Pesaḥim* 68a, *Sanhedrin* 99a/b, and see its medieval use in the Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Melakhim*, 12:1, para. 2). Jews in Mainz in this period were regarded as “serfs of the *imperium*” in the Roman legal sense. State servitude, of course, brought with it a special place alongside but not quite part of the feudal hierarchy and a degree of protection. But that aspect of the

status is not what the authorship of the manuscript is highlighting iconographically here.

- 13 See, for instance, Solomon bar Shimsh'on's account of the Crusaders in Mainz in 1096, written in mid-twelfth century; J. Marcus 1938, 115–120. Sentiments such as those expressed by Solomon bar Shimsh'on led to literary responses like those in the *'Akedah* of Ephraim b. Jacob of Bonn (1132–c. 1200); Spiegel 1967, 139–152.
- 14 On the legal status of Jews in Mainz under various monarchs, see Lotter 1989.
- 15 See BT *Sanhedrin* 44a. On conversion and its discontents, see Elukin 1997.
- 16 On adoption and adaptation, see Epstein 1997, 16–38, 96–112.
- 17 *Regensburg Pentateuch*, Germany, c. 1280–1300, Jerusalem, Israel Museum, MS 180/52, fol. 18v; *Tripartite Maḥzor*, southern Germany, c. 1325. London, British Library, MS Add. 22413, fol. 2: 3r.
- 18 Concerning placement, arrangement, and conventions with regard to iconographic meaning, see Camille 1992 and 1998.

3. Narrative Sequence

- 1 Regarding the “proper sequence” of events, see Narkiss in Spitzer 1965, 90. He attributed the “misplacement” of scenes to the fact that they are alluded to in the haggadah text: “In those cases where a historical scene is placed out of its proper sequence, e.g. the *Exodus from Egypt* on folio 25r, this is because the text contains, at this point, an allusion to the event.” He imagined this “lost model” to be a haggadah of higher aesthetic quality that once existed but has not survived. Moreover, he asserted that “similar illustrations in different Hebrew books of the same provenance but of better quality do survive.” But this statement is misleading: while “books of the same provenance”—mostly *maḥzorim*—do exist, there are no known haggadot of this date. A student of Kurt Weitzmann, Narkiss fully assimilated recension theory. See Kogman-Appel 2006, 4–5.

At various junctures throughout the text volume accompanying the facsimile, Narkiss opined that scenes of the Exodus were jumbled: “The fifth scene, of the actual *Exodus* [folio 25r, is shown, out of sequence,] . . . in connexion with the mention of the *matza*. . . The scenes of the preparation of the *matza* overleaf. . . are the continuation of the episode. The *Pursuit by Pharaoh and the Egyptians* (Exod. 14:8–9) appears on the preceding page (folio 24v) but with no relation whatever to the text on the page.” He called folio 23r “the last of the historical scenes . . . *Moses receiving the two Tables of the Law*,” though it (here, plate 14) is clearly out of order, followed as it is by Pharaoh's pursuit (plate 15), the Exodus (plate 16), and the

maḥzah making and baking scenes (plates 17, 18), as well as the scene of the eschatological Passover feast (plate 19), which, though at the denouement of history, is an “historical scene” as well; in Spitzer 1965, 91. In keeping with his penchant for reading all the illuminations as literal illustrations of the Exodus narrative, Narkiss was convinced that these last scenes are part of the historical Exodus sequence. He failed to apprehend the contextual and iconographic clues that indicate that the depiction of maḥzah baking is intended to represent contemporary practice, and that the banquet is intended to represent an eschatological celebration, as I will posit below.

- 2 Narkiss, in Spitzer 1965, 90.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 91–92.
- 4 The present cluster groupings are posited for the purposes of advancing an argument, and in contradistinction to assertions of a single “abridged Biblical cycle” sequence stretching through the manuscript, in which case the individual illuminations are obviously jumbled and out of sequence; *ibid.*, 90. The configuration of these iconographic clusters is, of course, open to interpretation. I contend that the arrangement of the illuminations—in whatever configuration—is neither random nor erroneous, but has its own internal logic. The particular sequences I propose in the body of the text are only one way in which one might imagine the organization of the manuscript. There are certainly a variety of other ways in which clusters and subsequences could be delineated.

Note that in my projection, each block and strand makes a distinct sociopolitical or theological point in response or contradistinction to the Christian story by appropriating (or, more accurately, by reappropriating) a significant detail from it. Although I believe that this appropriating is characteristic of many monuments of medieval Jewish visual culture (Epstein 1997, *passim*), I must stress that I do not believe that this is always the case in every manuscript.

- 5 Narkiss, in Spitzer 1965, 34, 90–91. After misapprehending the conception of the illustrations by asserting that the figures—for unspecified reasons—represent Abraham and Isaac, Narkiss then asserts: “The illustration [of Jacob and his sons going down to Egypt on folio 12r] in the lower part of the margin, is related to the text only vaguely.” He believes that this illustration should have come on folio 14r (“The verse ‘seventy was the number of souls with which thy forefathers went down to Egypt’ . . . [Deut. 10:22] appears on folio 14r with no illustration”). This belief is based on a presumption of literalness in the iconography of the manuscript: the image of Jacob and his

sons should appear where the verse is most explicit. But why is the illustration of Jacob and his sons going down to Egypt “only vaguely” related to the text on folio 12r (plate 4)? It seems a fine illustration for that text, which reads “Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.” In fact, the entirety of the folio’s iconography beautifully and fluidly illustrates the contiguous text on the page, “And [God] gave him [Isaac] Jacob and Esau. And to Esau he gave Mt. Seir to inherit, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt” (Goldschmidt 1969, 119). Narkiss errs further in calling the *bas-de-page* scene of Jacob and sons “the first [historical] scene [in the Haggadah].” It makes sense, as I shall demonstrate, that the all-important first scene is, in fact, that of Jacob and Esau, which sets the historical narrative in the context of the contemporary Jewish-Christian conflict.

6 Goldschmidt 1969, 119.

7 It is unclear what the proposed model could have been. Not until the appearance of printed haggadot in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the eighteenth-century manuscript haggadot that emulated them do we find a depiction of Abraham at this textual juncture, whether crossing the river to the Land of Promise, or at the Covenant of the Pieces (which also evokes Isaac in God’s promise of progeny to Abraham). There is little possibility that those very late editions correctly reflect a model held in common with, but misinterpreted, by the Birds’ Head Haggadah. Moreover, if one reads Jaffé and Narkiss carefully, it is clear from their qualifying statements that they recognize the weakness of their proposed identification of the figures as Abraham and Isaac.

8 On the image of Esau and Edom with relation to Jacob, see G. Cohen 1967 and Epstein 1997, 16–38, 113–119.

9 On Jacob and dominion, see Burdon 1998.

10 That these figures are depicted as kneeling is clearly intentional. The finely rendered examples of synagogue precentors on folios 32r, 33v, and 40r argue against a “simple,” thoughtless appropriation of a Christian mode of worship. The artists seem to have been both familiar with and capable of rendering Jewish prayer. One is left with the following possibilities: In depicting “contemporary” prayer, the artists had the option of illuminating prayer shawls and lecterns to telegraph the idea of prayer, and they exercised that option on folios 33v, 38v, and 40r. What is depicted here is biblical prayer, so prostration, one of the modes of biblical prayer, is depicted. See, for instance, various scriptural instances of prostration at prayer in the accounts of Moses and Aaron: Lev. 9:24; Num. 14:5, 16:23, 17:10, 20:6.

The other possibility is more speculative: the illumination may be a deliberate misreading of, or a pun upon Ps. 99:6, “*qor'im 'el YHWH*.” It tells the reader not to read *qor'im 'el YHWH*, “called out to the LORD” (with a *quff/aleph*) but *kor'im 'el YHWH*, “bowed down to the LORD,” (with a *kaf/ayin*) However, I can locate no other specific instances of the pun or *kri/ktiv qor'im/kor'im*.

11 Epstein 1997, 33–34.

12 Or “were faithful witnesses”; cf. Rashi there.

13 Or “slanders”; cf. Rashi there. The translation of the passage is mine, based on JPS.

14 Cf. Exod. 1:12 and Rashi there.

15 On the Crusade martyrdoms, narrative, and memory, see Marcus 1982. On the liturgical evocation of the *'Akedah* in Ashkenaz, see, for instance, the *siluk* for *Shaharit* of the second day of Rosh HaShanah, *'Asher mi ya'aseh ke-ma'asekha vi-khi-gvurotekha*; Goldschmidt 1970, 1: 112–121 (and see his notes on the midrashic antecedents of the poetry).

16 R. David Kimḥi (Radak, Provence, 1160–1235) on Ps. 99:8 asserts: “If God pardons in answer to prayer, he must still protect his holiness by chastising, lest people imagine that he takes sin lightly.” Rashi, commenting on the same verse, makes it clear that God punished all those who wronged Israel, including Moses, Aaron, and Samuel when they were too harsh in their criticism of God’s beloved people. See also the use of this verse as a proof-text in *Exodus Rabbah* 30:6.

17 On concealing and revealing in medieval Jewish art, see Epstein 1997, 31–35. For applications in Jewish culture, particularly in mysticism, see Wolfson 1994 and 1999. For apophysis, see Sells 1994.

18 See Gen. 27:28–29; 39–40.

19 Goldschmidt 1970, 257–259.

20 Goldschmidt 1969, 124.

21 See Exod. 8:22, and Rashi there. See also *Exodus Rabbah* 11:7.

22 On the centrality of sacrifice, including the Passover sacrifice, for the Jews and its abrogation under the new dispensation: 1 Cor. 5:7, Col. 2:16–17 and Heb. 9:22–25, 10:8–10.

23 John 1:29; cf. 1:36.

24 See Thomas Aquinas 1966 and the application of these ideas in canon law by the Council of Trent. Schroeder 1941, 13: 7, 77–78. See also the 1997 revision of the Catechism (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1997, art. 1415).

25 John 4:22.

26 Davidson 2001, passim particularly 128–177, and associated plates.

27 Narkiss’s ascription of this subject to the illumination stems possibly from its placement after the Crossing of the Sea of Reeds on the facing folio, but also because such a depiction was “expected,”

its appearance in other manuscripts presumably based on the lost ancient model. Singing figures, which differ from these depictions, most notably because of their upcast eyes, do appear in the Birds' Head Haggadah (the synagogue precentors on folios 32r, 33v, 40r).

- The group has sent one of their number. This might be Aaron (though he is depicted as a youth) or it could reflect or foreshadow the appointment of the representatives to deal with the Israelite complaints (Num. 11:16–17, Deut. 1:9–16). Again, though, these representatives were elders, and the figures depicted are youthful. Perhaps their youthfulness is meant to contrast with Moses' age. Perhaps also the four figures represent the four groups of tribes that encamped round the Tabernacle, as in the contemporary London, British Library, MS 15282, Duke of Sussex's German Pentateuch. Pentateuch with Megillot, southern Germany, c.1300, fol. 179v (plate 1).
- 28 The ink is so faded it will not reproduce well, but the inscriptions, described as faint by Jaffé and Narkiss, are still visible in the original; see Spitzer 1967, 36–37.
- 29 This illustration may correspond to the line in the *piyyut Dayyenu* that reads “Had he not fulfilled our needs in the desert for forty years, it would have been enough” (Goldschmidt 1969, 124). The Song at the Sea, Narkiss's proposed description of this scene, is not mentioned in *Dayyenu*.
- 30 On the Christian association of the Reed Sea crossing with baptism see 1 Cor. 10:2. And see Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, tractate XLV:X:9 (Augustine and John Chrysostom 1886, 605). On the Jewish side, the connection of *brit milah* with the splitting of the Sea is made explicitly in 'Aggadat Bereshit 17:1. But it is implicit in other texts such as *Genesis Rabbah* 87:8, which represents the Sea as having split as a reward to the descendants of Joseph for their ancestor's sexual continence. There are, furthermore, midrashim that assert that the sea fled from the sight of Moses' staff inscribed with the divine name (analogous, of course, to the male member inscribed with the sign of the Covenant); see, for instance, *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 3:8, *Midrash Tehillim* 114:9, 'Ozar Midrashim, Hallel VIII.
- 31 Narkiss posited, on the basis of similar depictions in Byzantine manuscripts, that this image was a misreading of a lost ancient model that depicted an altar on Mount Sinai. He also speculated that it may have been “a misunderstanding of the episode of the *Golden Calf*”; Spitzer 1965, 101. One might also conjecture that it represents Exod. 24:11, where the Israelite elders “saw God, . . . ate and drank.” But the illumination lacks any depiction of the elements of either of these

narratives— a sacrificial meal with an altar, a calf (golden or otherwise), or a feast of the elders. This image of the roasting of a ram on a spit must be a representation of the institution at Sinai of *Pessah Dorot*.

4. Eucharistic Polemics

- 1 See Langmuir 1990b, 57–134. Again, as in the case of the Jewish treatment of non-Jews in iconography, this is not to assert that there was no trickle-down nor should it imply that rhetoric never influenced behavior. I merely mean to accentuate that in light of current research the repercussions of theoretical theological considerations on the Jewish-Christian dialectic seem to be more subtle than previously acknowledged.
- 2 See Elukin 2007, passim.
- 3 On eucharistic piety and legislation, see Rubin 1999. On host desecration, see Rubin 1991. On the blood accusation and ritual murder, see Hsia 1988 and 1992. See also Dundes 1991; Langmuir 1990b; and Bynum 2004. On blood in the Middle Ages, see Bildhauer 2006; Bynum 2006; and Biale 2007.
- 4 The libel itself was a useful exemplum for the Church: If even the Jews believed in the real presence in the eucharist to the extent that they would attempt to recrucify the Lord through the desecration of the host, what excuse could faithful Christians have to doubt this doctrine? But because there was such widespread debate among the best minds in Christendom concerning what, exactly, it meant for the real presence of God to be manifest in the host, it stands to reason that many common people in the early fourteenth century might have had difficulty believing such a libel specifically because it imputed to Jews a “faith” concerning the concept of real presence that may still have been far from their own grasp. Thus, the ritual murder accusation formed for them a horrific and evocative, yet familiar and reinforcing parallel with the host desecration libel, wherein the victim was not a piece of transubstantiated bread, but a human being—usually a young male child—the very image of God's incarnation.
- 5 I am aware of the scholarly controversy surrounding the precise dating of Jesus' last meal relative to Passover, but am here constructing that meal as the “Passover” à la the Gospels and Christian tradition in order to make a rhetorical point. For a review of the literature, see Cohn-Sherbok 1990, chap. 4, and Smith 1991.
- 6 Rubin 1991, 135.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 119.
- 8 The more subtle elements in the connection between the host desecration libel and the ritual murder accusation devolve from the fact that as the Fourth Lateran Council affirmed the doctrine

of transubstantiation, theologians debated which “body of Christ” was present in the host. Was it the “historical” suffering Jewish physical body? Or was it the glorified “metahistorical” suffering physical body? Is some kind of spiritual body meant here? Or is it the innocent and unblemished childlike body?

- 9 Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury 1967, 84.
10 Schroeder 1937, 236–296 (canon 20, no. 137).
11 See Herbermann 1913, 5: 144–145. These structures, designed to reserve the sacrament, differed from monstrances, which were designed to display it. The relationship between these sacrament houses and the Gothic-spired spice boxes for the Jewish ritual of *havdalah*, which first appear in Central Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has yet to be fully explored. See M. G. Koolik 1982.
12 Fourteenth-century Christians continued to conjecture, as they had for centuries, that the Jews secretly and hypocritically neglected Jewish law in favor of acknowledgment of Christian truth, though publicly (through stubbornness and pride) perforce adjuring the tenets of Christianity. Knowing this, one can gauge how Christians became more comfortable with the doctrine of real presence by midcentury by the extent to which the hybrid charge of ritual murder and ritual blood use imputed to the Jews a secret belief in transubstantiation. Once Christians themselves had accepted the doctrine, it was easy for them to ascribe its secret acceptance to the Jews.
13 See Mt. 23 (“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!” vv.13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29).
14 There is a definite connection between eucharistic theology, host veneration, and the unholy trinity of libels against the Jews in the centuries after the Fourth Lateran Council. Once the host was theologically affirmed as God’s very body and that doctrine was promulgated by a Church Council that simultaneously affirmed the status of the Jews not merely as sightless bumbling, but as inveterate enemies of Christendom, there was no limit to gory imaginings concerning how the newly constructed body of God might be violated by the newly constructed enemies of God. The more real the presence of God in the host became, the more it was identified with the Christ child, the more fantasies concerning the abuse of the host could be turned in the direction of a surrogate for the host in the form of a young child. The doctrine, and the libels that grow out of it, override the possibility that Jews are blind naïfs, or misguided stubborn and hypocritical. They prove their willful and malicious stubbornness and hypocrisy, hence, theoretically, become guilty of breach of their “contract” with God which removes them

from the Church’s protection. They permit some of the baser desires of the mob, which had long required a legal sanction of some kind in order to be transformed into action, to be vented at the instigation and with the support of individual clerics, and without too much active opposition on the part of the institutional Church.

- It is no wonder that Chaucer’s Prioress who “would faint whene’er she saw a mouse caught in a trap” could retell, with no apparent signs of faint-heartedness, the tale of the boy who persisted in singing a hymn to the Virgin even after his throat was slit by the Jews and he was thrown into a privy. The sensitivity of one’s Christian conscience only went so far. A mouse caught in a trap certainly represented a model of arbitrary cruelty sufficient to cause a delicate soul to recoil. But Christian compassion could never extend to the atrocity of the perpetual violence to the very body of God by the enemies of God. The repercussions of such a lack of Christian compassion for those alleged enemies were enormous.
15 The dove descends typically in depictions of the baptism of Jesus and the annunciation to Mary. In his article accompanying the facsimile volume, Jaffé notes the divine hand poised in the classical Christian “Greek blessing,” and Narkiss engages a long excursus on the iconographic sources for the blessing hand shown here and on folio 23r (plate 14), including an analysis of the appearance of this motif in Greek Octateuchs of the eleventh and twelfth century. But nowhere does either scholar mention the eucharistic trope so evident here. The best summary of the use of dove-shaped eucharistic vessels remains the article by Arthur S. Barnes in the 1913 *Catholic Encyclopedia*. Herbermann 2004, 5: 144–145.
16 On the timing and connection of the blood libel/ritual murder accusation with Passover/Easter, see, for example, the incidents mentioned in Hsia 1988, 17, 37, 91, 204, among many others. On the connection of the host desecration accusation with Passover/Easter, see, for example, the incidents mentioned in Rubin 1999, 50, 139, among many others. On Mainz in particular, see Roth 2000, 332–333, 568–569.
The liturgy of the Holy Week period was historically anti-Jewish, with its prayer that God take the “veils from the hearts” of the “faithless Jews [*perfidis Judæis*]” and lead them from their blindness to the light of Christ (*Divine Service* 1878, 310–311). It was not until 1960 that Pope John XXIII removed the word “faithless” (Latin, *perfidis*) from the prayer. See Abbott and Pelikan 1966, 655–657; Alberigo and Komonchak 2003, 394.
The present pope, Benedict XVI, has sanctioned the restoration of some aspects of the

Tridentine liturgy, prompting protests by some Jewish groups (Fisher 2007). The Byzantine liturgy is even more explicit regarding the blindness and recalcitrance of the Jews. See Wybrew 1997, and Ware and Ware 1994.

Immediately before and during the early Reformation, during the “battle of the books,” a number of works presented competing exposés of the details of the celebration of Passover by the Jews. Johann Pfefferkorn’s German pamphlet (Pfefferkorn 1509) was subtitled *In disem buchlein vindet ein entlicher furtrag wie die blinden Juden yr Ostern halten* [In this little book you will find a definitive discourse as to how the blind Jews celebrate their Easter]. It was “answered” three years later by a complete (illustrated) translation into Latin of the Passover haggadah (Murner 1512). See also Margaritha 1530. On this work and on Margaritha, see Mieses 1916.

Following this trend in a later Reformation context was Rittangel 1644, the first haggadah with German translation alongside the Latin and Hebrew, and the first to incorporate musical notation. All these works served to clarify for Christians (at least for learned Christians, though there was undoubtedly some trickle-down effect) what exactly went on “behind closed doors” in Jewish ritual life. In a sense, the Birds’ Head Haggadah’s own exposé of Jewish kitchens and *mazah*-baking process is a precursor to these works, intended for internal use, as a sort of exercise in self-defense—in knowing what one’s opponents may accuse one of and being able to answer them.

- 17 See John 6:25–59, Jesus’ sermon at Capernaum. The first part, vv. 26–48, tropes manna, the “bread of heaven,” as Jesus or his teachings, to be received in a metaphoric sense as “spiritual food.” In the second part, vv. 52–59, manna foreshadows the eucharistic sacrifice. Manna is mentioned three times: it is dispensed by Moses (vv. 31–32, 49, 59), it is compared to Jesus as metaphoric “spiritual food” given by God the Father (vv. 32 ff.), and, finally, it appears as the eucharistic bread of eternal life (the body and blood of Jesus), given freely by Jesus himself. There is a clear hierarchy here: manna, a type of the eucharist, was nonetheless a physical food and could not ward off death. The “spiritual food” given by God the Father is the bread of heaven in the form of the incarnation of Jesus and his teachings, an object of faith. The highest level is constituted by the actual body and blood of Jesus, which he here promises for the future.

Compare the following Jewish sources, some of which (like the illumination in the Birds’ Head Haggadah) may be responses to this Christian

appropriation of the biblical topos. *Ba’al Ha-Turim* in *Parshat ‘Ekev* (8:3) states that the manna increased the awareness of the Israelites. See also *Midrash Tehillim* 78 (*lekhem ‘avirim*) Braude: 1959 2: 24, and R. Bahye (R. Bahye b. ‘Asher ‘ibn Hālawā, Saragossa, Spain, mid-thirteenth century–1340) on Exod. 16:15, which both discuss the manna as the food of angels. See also BT *Yom’a* 75b, where God declares that by providing manna for the Israelites, God wished to make them like the ministering angels, and *Zohar, Shemot*, 61b. According to Matt, the following hierarchy is delineated in this passage: “*Mazah* (is) of a higher spiritual nature than ordinary food. Manna is even more spiritual than *mazah* since it derives from Heaven (*Tiferet*).” This food bypasses the body and nourishes the soul (cf. Deut. 8:3, *Wisdom of Solomon* 16:26). On manna as the “word of YHVH,” see *Mekhilt’a, Va-yoshi’a*, 5:172; and Philo (*Deterius* 118). For the *Zohar*, it is the “food of the Comrades, higher than manna, that comes from *Hokhmah*, divine Wisdom or *Logos*.” See Matt 1983, 113–116, 247. Compare this hierarchy with the various “levels” of manna in John 6:25–59. On the eucharist as “abominable bread” in anti-Christian polemic and invective, see Berger 1979, 219.

- 18 See N. Roth 2002, 291, 298–299.

5. Metahistorical Connections

- 1 On temporal interpenetrability, see Pohle 1913. On the interpenetrability of time in pilgrimage and miracle narratives, see Uebel 2002.
- 2 On medieval Jewish sources for temporal interpenetrability, see Caputo 1999.
- 3 The idea of various stages and levels of redemption probably originates in the reading by commentators of the five terms for redemption in Exod. 6:6–8. See Rashi, the *Ba’al Ha-Turim* and the *’Ohr Ha Ḥayyim*, on those verses. Naḥmanides’ comments are the most extensive. The term *Pessaḥ Mizrayim* is used by Rashi and Naḥmanides in their comments on Exod. 12. See also Naḥmanides on Lev. 14 and Num. 9. The locus classicus of comparison between *Pessaḥ Mizrayim* and *Pessaḥ Dorot* is *Toseft’a Pesaḥim* 8. Other crucial loci are *Mekhilt’a B’o* 4, *Mishnah Pesaḥim* 9, BT *Pesaḥim* 96a, and *Bekhorot* 56a and 57b. Also see JT *Pesaḥim* 47b and 65b. Finally, see Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah* on *Hilkhot Qorban Pessaḥ*, chap. 5, where he depends heavily on the *Toseft’a*. The term *Pessaḥ Ba-Zeman Ha-Zeh* is less common, but it is found in BT *Pesaḥim* 74a, and in Rashi’s commentary on BT *Megillah* 2a.

Pessaḥ Ge’ulah is my own term, coined to describe the Passover offering in the restored Temple. At the end of *Mishnah Berakhot* 1:15, there

is an assertion that the Exodus needs to be discussed *le-hav'i liyemot ha-Mashiah*—even in the Messianic Age. This assertion is incorporated into the text of the haggadah itself; Goldschmidt 1969, 118. Rabbinic tradition has it that the future redemption will occur on the fifteenth of Nissan, the night of Israel's Exodus from Egypt. Moses declared that on the night God protected Israel from the Angels of Destruction, God would, in the future, initiate the final redemption (cf. *Targum Yerushalmi* on Exod. 12:42 and *Targum Yerushalmi II* on Exod. 15:8). See *Pesikta DeRav Kahanah* 17, 129b; *Pirkei De-Rabi Eliezer*, 195b–196a (which seems to refer to the night of the plague of darkness rather than the night of Passover). On Passover in the Messianic Age, see *Midrash Lekah Tov* on Exod. 12:16.

The idea of a Passover of Redemption is evident in the text of the haggadah itself, obviously in statements like “In the coming year, in Jerusalem,” but also in the blessing of *Ge'ulah*:

“Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has redeemed us and redeemed our ancestors from Egypt, and brought us, on this night, to eat *mazah* and *maror*. Thus may You, our God and God of our ancestors, bring us to future festivals and holidays, which come to greet us in peace, when we will rejoice in the rebuilding of your city and be joyous in the service of your Temple, and where we shall partake of the sacrifices and Passover offerings whose blood will be sprinkled on the sides of your altar for gracious acceptance. Then we shall thank You with a new song for our redemption and for the deliverance of our souls. Blessed are You, Adonai, who has redeemed Israel.” (Goldschmidt 1969, 126. In the Birds' Head Haggadah, the leaf with the text is missing before the words “[Thank] You with a new song.”)

The wording of this blessing is simultaneously subtler and more explicit than that of the statement “In the coming year, in Jerusalem.” The *pshat*, the contextual meaning of “Thus may You, our God and God of our ancestors, bring us to future festivals and holidays,” is the expression of the hope that God will bring the celebrants in peace to future festivals (Shavuot and Sukkot) and holidays (Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur). The hint implicit in the phrase, particularly when it is read along with the wishes for the rebuilding of God's city and the restoration of sacrifices in God's rebuilt Temple, is of other holidays to come—holidays celebrating the messianic redemption. See Ben Zoma's opinion that the need to recite *sippur Yezi'at Mizrayim* would be abrogated in the messianic times (BT *Berakhot* 12b–13a). His contention is based on Jer. 16:14–15

and 23:7–8. The counterarguments are made by the Sages, who assert that the disagreement simply concerned whether Passover would be secondary to the holidays of the new redemption, not whether Passover would be abrogated. It would have been interesting to know if this blessing was illustrated on the missing leaf of the Birds' Head Haggadah, and if so, how.

- 4 The *Book of Jubilees* (17:15b; 18:4) asserts that Abraham is called to the sacrifice on 12 Nissan, and takes three days to travel to Moriah, per Gen. 22:4, thus arriving and accomplishing the deed on 15 Nissan, the day of Passover. *Exodus Rabbah* opines that “in Nissan . . . they shall be redeemed in the future . . . in this month Isaac was born and in this month he was bound [as a sacrifice]” (15:11). See also BT *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 11a–b, where there is a debate between R. Eliezer, who maintains that redemption will come in Tishrei, and R. Yehoshua, who maintains that it will occur in Nissan. Both are in agreement that Isaac was born on Passover. If the tradition holds that the *'Akedah* occurred on Isaac's birthday, known to the authorship of *Exodus Rabbah* as a commonplace, then both R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua would also have agreed that the *'Akedah* occurred on Passover. However, whether they shared that assumption with *Exodus Rabbah* is unknown.

Yuval speculates on the reasons for the rabbinic association of the two events (Yuval 2006, 57 n. 62). On the date of the *'Akedah* and its repercussions for art, see also Gutmann 1987. Medieval Jewish martyrdom was often associated with the *'Akedah*. The theological frustration of Shlomo b. Shimsh'on in the wake of the events of May 27, 1096, is particularly palpable and poignant. See J. Marcus 1938, 115–120.

The Crusade martyrdoms occurred right before Shavuot because of the date the Crusade was preached, and was not connected to blood libels or host desecration accusations, which, as noted above, often occurred during the Passover/Easter season; Rubin 1999, 139, 196, 197 discusses a passage from the lament R. Avigdor Kara of Prague (d. 1439) over the massacres in the wake of the host desecration libel that occurred in that city in 1389: “*Et kol ha-tela'ah* [All the afflictions which have befallen us].” In this poem, the topoi of both the baking and burning of Passover mazot, of martyrdom as the Passover sacrifice, and of the evocation of the *'Akedah* are used in proximity because the massacre occurred at Passover time. Some argue that the entire text of the haggadah is a response to Christianity and to Easter liturgy. See Yuval 2006 and the article with which he inaugurated his inquiry, Yuval 1995. Kulp 2005 discusses Yuval and summarizes the state of the current literature.

On the role and practice of typology in Judaism generally, see Funkenstein 1993, 114–115, and Saperstein 1993. On internal “foreshadowings” of Pessaḥ in rabbinic literature, particularly vis-à-vis the *Akedah*, see Davies 1979; Elbaum 1986; Hayward 1990.

- 5 Contemporary Ashkenazic liturgical poetry included the *piyyut* ‘*Omez G’vurotekhaḥ* (*Ve-’Amartem Zevaḥ Pessaḥ*), taken from a *piyyut* by Kallir (recited in Ashkenaz in the synagogue on the second day of Passover, and at home, at the seder, on the second night). It contains the line “He fed the angels with unleavened cakes [when they announced Isaac’s birth] on Passover”; Goldschmidt 1969, 138. It is present in the Birds’ Head Haggadah (fols. 42v–44v).
- 6 Narkiss (Spitzer 1965, 91) was troubled by the fact that “the depiction of the Killing of the Passover Lamb” is an event that is “not recorded in the *Haggada* at all.” He apparently failed to notice that both the Egyptian Passover and the later Passover sacrifice are, in fact, mentioned in the haggadah text (Goldschmidt 1969, 125). He referred to the creature being sacrificed here as well as on folios 23r and 26v as a lamb, when it is, rather, a red ram with large and distinctive yellow horns. Narkiss saw what he believed *should* be shown, rather than what appears. He viewed folios 21r, 23r, and 26v as “connected”—in other words, as a sequence of illustrations of the Passover sacrifice, presumably that of the original Egyptian Passover—but failed to explain what the connection is or why these illustrations are spread out over the manuscript in the way they are.
- 7 Goldschmidt 1969, 127.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 136. If the time between the destruction of the Second Temple and its anticipated restoration sets the temporal boundaries for the “Jewish Middle Ages,” Dimitrovsky 1986 cogently points to the defining feature of the period in the emergence of Talmud study as an ideal throughout the culture.
- 9 Narkiss in Spitzer 1965, 107; emphasis added.
- 10 *Mishnah Pesahim* 4:4 forbids the consumption of roast lamb at the Seder to mitigate the appearance of eating the actual Paschal sacrifice in the absence of a Temple. “Where it is accepted practice to eat roast meat on the night of Passover, one may do so, but where this is not accepted practice one may not do so.” Jews in Franco-Germany followed this ruling. In fact, since they followed the customs of the Land of Israel (as codified in JT *Pesahim* 28a), they refrained from eating any roasted food that required ritual slaughter on the seder night.

Maimonides, in his codification of law, accepted by Spanish Jews, quotes the *Mishnah*

nearly verbatim: “Where it is accepted practice to eat roast meat on the night of *Pessaḥ* one may do so, but where this is not accepted practice one may not do so and this is a decree of the sages so that people should not think that it is Paschal lamb [that is being consumed]. However, everywhere it is forbidden to eat roast lamb [at the Seder]” (*Mishneh Torah, Hamez U-Mazah* 8:11). In spite of Maimonides’ ruling, Sephardim presently rule according to the *Shulḥan ‘Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 476:1, which states that roast lamb may be eaten with the stipulation that it not be roasted whole, as was the Passover sacrifice. Because the halakhic definition of “roasting” refers to cooking with direct heat, it is easy to imagine how one could be stringent with regard to what was forbidden, as cooking with direct heat covers a great many methods of preparation. The *Tur* (Spain, 1270–c. 1340) specifies that the only forbidden roast meat is a lamb that has been roasted whole over a spit (*OH* 476, also citing JT *Pesahim* 28a with reference to the more stringent custom). Questions yet to be considered by historians and relevant to the iconography include how, short of the presumption that they followed the customs of the Land of Israel, the Ashkenazic custom developed and was applied in the Middle Ages. See Tabory 1996, 92–105, esp. 103–105.

- 11 Goldschmidt 1969, 126.
- 12 For a comparably frontal depiction of a banquet scene (incidentally also eschatological), see the depiction of the feast of righteous in Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana MS B. 30–32 inf. Bible, southern Germany, 1238, fol. 3: 135r.
- 13 The scene is described in Spitzer 1965, 53. The catchword *nissim* (miracles) appears on the bottom of the folio. Of the three catchwords on the verso of the last leaf of each of the three gatherings, this is the only one that is surrounded by an elaborate decorative frame. The other two catchwords, on folios 32v and 40v, are pricked out simply. The emphasis on this word may point to the miraculous reality of the seder of redemption here depicted.
- 14 Elukin 2007, *passim*.

6. Eschatological Hopes

- 1 Goldschmidt 1969, 126.
- 2 *Mahzor Vitry* is a compendium of prayer texts and laws regarding prayer compiled by Simḥah b. Samuel of Vitry (d. 1105), a student of Rashi, and incorporating a great deal of evidence of the practice of Rashi and his school. For the analogue to this passage, see *Mahzor Vitry* 1889, 293.

The text is cited in some sources as part of the *Mekhila* of R. Shimon. See, for example, *Midrash Ha-Gadol* on Exod. 14:25 (Hoffmann 1905, 52), but

this ascription was disproved by Louis Ginzberg (Ginzberg et al. 2003, 538 n. 213). Corroboration is found in Baron and Marx 1935, Hebrew section, 114. It is rare in Ashkenaz, because the Ashkenazic rite derives from that of the Land of Israel, and this midrash was effectively banned by the Sages of the Land of Israel, though it is present in Provence and in the Sephardic rites. The reason for the ban seems to have been to moot the possibility of unwarranted empowerment of angels and to forestall excessive anthropomorphism. *Exodus Rabbah* 17:5 already displays the degree of ambivalence with which scholars in the rabbinic period approached Exod. 12:23, “Some say through an angel, and some say the Holy Blessed One, alone.” But the medieval development is clear in the halakhic preface to the passage in *Maḥzor Vitry*, which is worth citing at length: “*They said that when [the Sovereign of the Universes] descended...*” This is not from the order of the haggadah, and it is not written in my *Mekhilt’a* with the rest of the *aggadic* material relevant to ‘An Aramean oppressed my father.’ It seems a *kal ve-homer* [an *a fortiori* argument, deriving from the passage that] ‘[an earthly king’s] servants surround him so that his person will not be harmed.’ [This is taken to the logical conclusion that God, as] ‘King [of the King of Kings,] etc. [would certainly merit a guard on his person.]’ But how can one imagine that harm could come to the Holy Blessed One? For is it not written, ‘Glory and majesty are before Him’ (Ps. 96:6)? Therefore [because of this theological problem] it [this passage] is not essential and our Master is not accustomed to say it. Additionally, this opening “They said that when [the Sovereign of the Universes] descended...” interrupts the exegesis that it began, and comes to interpret ‘And the LORD God took us out [of Egypt, not by the hand of an angel] etc.’, meanwhile branching out into various matters that are not relevant to the exegesis, and after this returns to the verse at hand—‘And the LORD God took us out [of Egypt, not by the hand of an angel]’ as it says ‘with a strong hand—this is the murrain.’ Therefore it is excessively verbose. And here follows the *aggadah* (in *Erez Yisra’el* they decreed that it not be said, but in Provence, they were accustomed to say it).”

The *Maḥzor Vitry* text asserts that there are two problems with this *aggadah* that led to its being banned in *Erez Yisra’el*/Ashkenaz: first, it is deemed theologically problematic in that it implies that God needs protection like “a king of flesh and blood.” Second, it is claimed to stray from its exegetical focus, and seems peripheral to the point of the discourse. Considering the prevalence of anthropomorphizing midrash, as well as

the tendency of much exegesis (including that found in the “standard” text of the haggadah) to stray, these objections seem to be screening a larger concern about the vengeful impetus of text. The *Maḥzor Vitry* authorship avoids citing the vengefulness of the text as a reason for its disclusion. Perhaps it was not an issue for the authorship, but perhaps it is not cited in order to avoid calling even more attention to it. For the post-modern reader, of course, the text’s vengefulness is the elephant in the room. It is interesting that the Birds’ Head Haggadah actually amplifies the sentiment by expanding and amplifying the text in some ways (the variety of destructive angels), while it takes even greater measures to mask it in others (in eliding the angels and the Israelites, and in failing to have God articulate that the vengeance he will undertake is the desire of the Israelites).

- 3 The *mem* (of) is left unvocalized and a *vav* (and) is added above.
- 4 Goldschmidt comments on this curious text only in passing, remarking simply that it “has not been generally accepted and is even expressly refuted by some authorities” (Spitzer 1965, 117). He nonetheless quotes it in Hebrew in its entirety. Goldschmidt was aware of this text, having discussed it twice previously (Goldschmidt 1936, 111; Goldschmidt 1969, 85–87). However, faced with the prospect of presenting this vengeful passage to the urbane audience of this lavish facsimile volume, Goldschmidt’s discomfort with the text is transparent in the fact that (like the “naughty bits” in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century classical scholarship) it goes untranslated, and his own wish that the addendum not be there in the first place is palpable in his laconic comment concerning the lack of acceptance for this passage.
- 5 “Vengeance”: Finkelstein 1938, 308, translates “war” (avoiding the concept of *nekamah* [vengeance]) on authority of the text of the Baghdad rite editions Calcutta 1844 and 1889, and Bombay 1887, per his note 34. If, as I assert, vengeance is one of the themes of this manuscript, the fact that *nekamah* is the word of choice in this text may once again be intentionally evocative of Ps. 99:8, which I asserted formed the underlying commentary of the illustration of the prayer of Moses and Aaron (plate 7).

There are several variations of this midrash: Goldschmidt 1969, 86, presents an annotated text, citing English, French, Yemenite, and Baghdadi versions with slight variations. The most important variant for the present purposes is the one mentioned above in the text following this note. See the excerpts from *Seder Rav Sa’adiah*, printed in Amram and Frumkin 1911, 108b; Rashi 1911, 193;

- Eliezer b. Judah [Rokeah] 2006, 100, and see n. 239 for the corrupt text according to Eliezer b. Judah [Rokeah] 1984 is emended against six manuscripts; Judah HaLevi 1972 (3:73), 149; Gross, *ʿAsufot*, in Berliner and Hoffmann 1876, 10:64; Luzzato in Polak et al. 1847, 41; Schechter 1892, 255; Kaufmann 1892, 554–555; Finkelstein 1938, 307–308, who cites “the haggadah according to the rite of Yemen (n.d.),” the Haggadah according to the rite of Baghdad, Calcutta edition, 1844 and 1889, and Bombay, 1887. Finkelstein opines that “the ascription of the saying to R. Meir may be correct. At any rate it is certain that despite the authority of the Passover Haggadah and the *Mekhilʿa* of R. Ishmael, many later scholars insisted that God descended to Egypt to redeem Israel, surrounded by hosts of angels.”
- 6 *ʿAvadekhah mi-bnei britekhah* is a variant of *ʿamkha bnei britekhah* (“Your Nation, the Children of Your Covenant”), which is used in classical rabbinic sources only of the Israelites and postbiblical Jews. See the *Shaharit* liturgy: “The pre-eminence of human beings over beasts is naught, for all is vanity” (Eccl. 3:19). But we are *Your Nation, the children of Your Covenant*” (*Siddur*, Ashkenazic 2009, 36, emphasis added). See this quoted in Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Seder Tefillot Kol Ha-Shanah*, para. 2. See also *Tann’a DeBei Eliyahu Rabbah* 22:4.
- 7 Goldschmidt fails even to cite his own considerable previous research on this passage in his 1937 work *Die Pessach-Haggada* (Berlin, Schocken) (Hebrew translation, Goldschmidt 1969, 86).
- 8 “A variant which occurs in many manuscripts, in the Italian, Byzantine, Sephardi, Southern French and other rites”; Goldschmidt, in Spitzer 1965, 116.
- 9 In the version more prevalent in Ashkenazic manuscripts.
- 10 *ʿomdim* vs. *ʿamad*, emphasis added.
- 11 The script is comparable in both size and morphology to the notes on folio 7v, for instance.
- 12 Yaʿakov was a common name among poets of this time and place. Goldschmidt fails to explain why he ascribes the mnemonic to the great Ashkenazic sage R. Jacob b. Meir (Rabbenu Tam, c. 1100–1171). He may have concluded that the author was Rabbenu Tam on the basis of the use in the manuscript itself of the midrash discussed above and attested in *Maḥzor Vitry* 1889, 293 (“[17r] They said that when the Sovereign of the Universes descended . . .”). The inclusion of this midrash certainly suggests that the manuscript has some intellectual relationship to the school of Rabbenu Tam, but there is no particular evidence that the author of the poetic *siman* was Rabbenu Tam himself.
- Goldschmidt also ascribes the commentary to a known individual, R. Jacob of Orleans, a French

tosafist and student of Rabbenu Tam who moved to London in 1171 and was martyred in 1189 during the anti-Jewish riots attendant upon the coronation of Richard I. The text does contain his name, but it is not clear whether he is the author or merely quoted by the anonymous compiler. In the last line of column 1, there is a lacuna in which a verb relating to the role of R. Jacob of Orleans is missing and not visible in the original manuscript. Elisabeth Hollender (private correspondence) maintains that if it was R. Jacob of Orleans who compiled the commentary, the usual language of *piyyut* commentary at this juncture would have been *nir’eh li’ani* (“it seems to me”) or some abbreviation thereof, since the lacuna is not wide enough for the full phrase. Hollender (private correspondence) comments that the author would have been unlikely to refer to himself as “Jacob of Orleans”:

“In *piyyut* commentary, one finds identifications like ‘I, ʿAharon b. Ḥayyim ha-Kohen,’ or ‘I, Yaʿakov ha-Kattan,’ but definitely not the type ‘I, Samuel of Babenberg.’ On the other hand, students often refer to their teachers with the location added to the name. Accordingly, it is most likely that the (anonymous) compiler is merely quoting something that R. Jacob of Orleans had explained, and so chances are that the missing text would have been something like *piresh* (‘he [R. Jacob of Orleans] interpreted’) which even could be abbreviated.” Hollender’s sense is that *piresh* is what was written here and that we have an anonymous compiler who is simply quoting R. Jacob of Orleans, just as he quotes a certain (unidentified) R. Meir later.

It is unclear why Goldschmidt was so shy of the text. Did he leave the poem and commentary untranslated because of a perceived lack of interest in what he labeled a halakhic instructional text on the part of patrons of a facsimile of an illuminated Jewish manuscript? Or was he really blinded to the interest of the *pshat* commentary and its strong relationship to the iconographic and other textual themes in the manuscript?

- 13 See Hollender 2008, chaps. 3–5.
- 14 “R. Shimon bar Yohai said, ‘Love distorts the natural order of things, and hatred distorts the natural order of things.’” *Genesis Rabbah Va-Yer’a* 55:8.
- 15 On compilations and the difficulty of ascribing *piyyutim* to particular authors, see Hollender 2008, 10–15, 71–223.
- 16 On double commentaries, see Hollender 2008, 195ff. Hollender 2008, chaps. 3–5, describes the various commentary genres. In her private correspondence with me she stresses the unusual nature of halakhic commentary.
- 17 Jer. 2:21.

- 18 *Nokem*; cf. Ps. 99:8 and folio 15v.
- 19 Gen. 8:11.
- 20 Isa. 5:7.
- 21 Exod. 1:14.
- 22 On anti-Christian invective in *piyyut*, see Hollender 2008, 136–142.
- 23 For a discussion of these and other “signs” imprinted on the *mazah* itself—including decorative pricking—in the halakhic literature, see Eliezer b. Judah [Rokeah] 2006, 129–134.
- 24 See the medieval commentators’ discussion of Exod. 24:10, where the pavement before God’s throne has the appearance of *livnat ha-sappir* (a brick of sapphire). Rashi says, “The meaning of the *livnat ha-sappir* is that it was a brick that was before Him at the time of the oppression in order to recall the suffering of Israel, for they [the Egyptians] oppressed them in the matter of making bricks. As for the ‘essence of the clear skies’ this refers to when the people were redeemed from bondage, for then there was light and joy before Him” (based on *Leviticus Rabbah* 23:8). Hizkuni amplifies Rashi’s reading by quoting what seems to be a lost midrash: “Said Rabbi Akiva: the servants of Pharaoh would pressure and strike the Israelites so that they would make more than their quota of bricks... but the Egyptians would not provide them with straw so that they would have to gather the stubble in the wilderness. That stubble, though, was full of thorns and thistles so that their heels would be wounded when gathering it. Their blood would flow and mix with the mud. Rachel, who was the granddaughter of Metushelah, was pregnant and due to give birth but had to continue with her husband treading out the clay to make bricks. The child was born while she was treading and became encased in the brick mold. She cried out for her newborn and her cries ascended to the Throne of Glory. The archangel Michael then descended and took the clay, bringing it to the Throne of Glory and fashioning it into a brick. This brick was placed by the feet of the Holy One Blessed be He, as the verse states ‘and by his feet was the likeness of a brick of sapphire.’ Read not ‘sapphire’ (“SaPPiR”) but rather ‘afterbirth’ (“SHaFiR”), that is to say a brick that was fashioned from the afterbirth of that mother.” Another version of this midrash will be adduced below to interpret the image in the Golden Haggadah (plate 36, top right; fig. 56).
- 25 That is, the received rabbinic tradition, as per BT *Pesaḥim* 116a.
- 26 Cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 17:3 for the blood of circumcision and the Passover sacrifice, and see Biale 2007, 117–122, for the addition to the equation of the blood of martyrdom.
- 27 This correlates with what Hollender has found in twelfth-century Ashkenazic and Tsarfatic *piyyutim*,

- particularly those composed for a Shabbat of the week on which a *Brit Milah* is performed in a particular synagogue. (Private correspondence.)
- 28 See the Blessing of the New Month. (*Siddur*, Ashkenazic 2009, 526.)
- 29 Jaffé’s discussion of the illuminations calls attention to the architecture depicted throughout the manuscript, pointing out that it is generally representative of the first flowering of Gothic, with certain retarditaire Romanesque elements. On close inspection, however, the elements of interior and exterior architecture prove to be arrayed throughout the manuscript in a concerted manner, one that bespeaks a tension more than simply between the old and the new. I believe we are actually seeing a dialectic between the metaphoric values of “old” and “new.” Romanesque architectural elements are used on the simplest level to represent the antique. They can also represent the solidity and security of tradition. Finally, they may be used to contrast the sensate world, the world of what *is*, with the world to come—the world of what will or should be. Gothic, on the other hand, represents the contemporary, the here and now, what is most “real” either in a physical or a spiritual sense.

Folio 1v, the first surviving, though damaged leaf (plate 2), is a good example of the use of architectural elements to set a theological tone: The interior space is characterized by the graceful interplay of Gothic shapes. Even the griffin-headed celebrants are defined by elegant S-curves, emphasizing the contemporary and “real” nature of the proceedings. But the Gothic arch is backed by Romanesque crenellated exterior battlements, representing security, but simultaneously anticipating a time when the exterior will be like the interior, a time when the need for such security will be obsolete. Thus, the interior represents things as they should be, whereas the exterior represents them as they are, at least, for the moment.

These contrasts are borne out as one examines the architectural elements in other scenes: Egypt in general (plate 4) and the particular cities of Pithom and Ra’amses (plate 6) are represented in Romanesque style, utilizing the *pshat* of Romanesque to emphasize that this part of the story occurred in “ancient” times. The gates of Paradise / Garden of Eden (plate 22) and Rebuilt Jerusalem (plate 24), on the other hand, are constructed in light and airy Gothic style: as places within the direct jurisdiction of God, they need no defense; they are as they ought to be. Their Gothic elements emphasize that though they may seem to be the stuff of legend, they are not ancient and far away, but contemporary and “present.” Three figures, presumably the three Patriarchs, are shown entering the Garden of Eden. The artists reconcile the fact that they are historical characters

and that they originate in “this world” by showing them entering into its Gothic halls through the literally liminal space of a Romanesque-style gateway. Jacob and Esau, on the other hand, are depicted within Gothic *aediculae*, figuring them not as ancient Patriarchs, but as contemporary figures, highlighting once again the centrality and relevance of the relationship between Jews and Christians (plate 4, top).

30 On the nomianism and antinomianism at the denouement of history, see Jer. 31:31–33, with its references to “broken” and new covenants. That text is quoted (with the explanation that “God finds fault with [the Israelites] when he says [this]”) by Paul in Heb. 8:8–12. Jesus’ own opinions, filtered through the Synoptics, are notoriously difficult to parse; see Banks 1975. For Paul himself, the issue was assuring the Gentile Christians that they were not obligated to follow the laws; it was understood that “Jewish Christians” were so obligated. (Romans 2:17–18, and especially Acts 21:24, 25, and see Banks 1974, 173–85, and Schreiner 1993.)

After the “parting of the ways” with “Jewish” Christianity, mainstream doctrine held that the law had been abrogated and a New Covenant—one of grace—had been established through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, although the occasional Judaizing heresy or sect surfaced among Christians (for a survey, see Newman 1925). Recent reassessments of the “parting of the ways” include Boyarin 2006, Yuval 2006, and Becker and Reed 2003.

On the eternity of the law in Jewish literature, see Davies 1952 and Banks 1975, 49–64, 67–85. The best recent comparative treatment is Chester 1998.

31 Cf. BT *Shabbat* 63a, 141b, BT *Pesaḥim* 68a, BT *Sanhedrin* 91b. See also Maimonides’ use of this topos in *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 9, and *Hilkhot Melakhim* 12.

32 Because *bnei ḥorin* is literally “children of redemption,” one could connect the youth of figures with the idea of *bnei ḥorin* just as I earlier posited a possible connection between *bnei Yisra’el* (“children of Israel”) and the putative youth of the figures depicted leaving Egypt (plate 16).

33 Spitzer 1965, 22.

34 In order to be translated “This book of Redemption belongs to me” and so forth, the inscription should have begun “*Zeh Sefer Ha-Ge’ulah*.” One might argue that the final *heh* of *Ha-Ge’ulah* was lost in the tear, but that does not account for the lack of the necessary *heh* preceding the word, which would have formed the “of” in the phrase “of Redemption.” The inscription also lacks the *vav* that would have made the third word *ge’ulah* (redemption) rather than *ga’al* ([So-and-so]

redeemed). The word *ge’ulah* is not generally written *ḥasser*. Finally, the inscription as it stands contains the definite article *heh* before the word *sefer*, causing the two initial words to translate as “This book” rather than the proposed “This is the Book.”

Ivan G. Marcus asserts that “a Pietist was not to pawn a Jewish holy book—a *sefer*—to obtain a loan from a Christian, even if the book remained in Jewish hands as collateral” (Marcus 1986, 14, quoting *Sefer Ḥassidim*, para. 689). See also Sirat 1996, 13. So, in the case of this or similar examples of flyleaf annotations indicating that books have been redeemed from having been pawned, one must conclude that the owners were not pietists, or that the practice was widespread even among pietists and that the condemnation of this behavior in *Sefer Ḥassidim*, though proscriptive, is actually also descriptive.

7. Silence Is Golden

- 1 This is, of course, a subjective opinion. One could just as convincingly argue that the illuminations of the Birds’ Head Haggadah are elegantly and masterfully rendered. The manuscript is aesthetically balanced. Its calligraphy is particularly fine: a gorgeous example of what might be called Hebrew Gothic. In early fourteenth-century Franco-Germany, there were certainly conventions for the depiction of expression and emotion in human faces, but the artists of the Birds’ Head Haggadah had to be extraordinarily skilled and creative to impart such individuality of lively expression to the faces of birds.
- 2 In my opinion, the idea that a manuscript can look “non-Jewish” needs to be reassessed. What evidence really exists that Jews were barred from learning the trade of book illumination? Even if Jews were banned from guilds, it is not possible to account for every friend, every neighbor, every kind (or impecunious) illuminator who might have taught one Jew “the trade” and every Jew who might have served as a master for other illuminators in the community.

I use quotes around the term “Hebrew illuminated manuscripts,” preferring to describe these works as “Jewish” illuminated manuscripts. The term Hebrew illuminated manuscripts has the advantage of sounding precise and scientific, a simple categorization on the basis of linguistic content. But of course it is much more ambiguous than it seems: Does it refer to the illumination of manuscripts whose language is Hebrew? Or does it signify the process of the illumination of manuscripts as undertaken by “Hebrews”? And what, in the end, do we gain by avoiding the use of the term “Jewish”? Unlike Arabic manuscripts, many of which are written in the Arabic language without necessarily being Muslim in content, the

vast majority of illuminated manuscripts written in Hebrew are Jewish in content. And unlike Greek manuscripts, which were commissioned both by Christians and by Greek-reading non-Christians, Hebrew manuscripts were overwhelmingly commissioned by Jewish patrons for Jewish audiences. With the exception of the occasional inclusion of translations of medical or philosophical works, most surveys of “Hebrew illuminated manuscripts” include manuscripts with identifiably Jewish content: scripture, liturgy, law, poetry, and philosophy. They also routinely include Jewish manuscripts whose language is not Hebrew at all, but Judeo-Arabic, Yiddish, or Ladino. So when scholars speak of “Hebrew illuminated manuscripts” they are invariably referring to Jewish illuminated manuscripts. Calling them “Hebrew illuminated manuscripts” rings hollow and archaic in an era when no one any longer fears using the “J” word in polite company.

3 Narkiss 1997, 67.

4 Ibid., 25, 29, 37, 45, 55–63.

5 On the concept of *illo tempore*, see Eliade 1959, 20.

6 By “natural sequence” I mean reading the quadrants from the right-hand folio, top right to top left, bottom right to bottom left; left-hand folio, top right to top left, bottom right to bottom left. Previous researchers have analyzed the illuminations in their conventional order, but I will point out some details that seem to have eluded them, or that they were discounted or deemphasized, in order to prepare the ground for a more complex and nuanced discussion of the other possible relationships between the illuminations.

By “the same relative position within each group” I mean, for example, comparing the second illumination on the first folio of the Genesis group with the second illumination on the first folio of the Exodus group.

By “proximate or chaismic” I mean reading the quadrants from top to bottom, not in sequence and crosswise across the folio and across the bifolium, as well as considering their position within the overall matrix of the bifolium.

7 On the obviation of the depiction of the divine image, see Kogman-Appel 2006, 99–109, and *passim*.

8 Sacrificial animals had to be of the “clean” or proper class of animals (Gen. 7:23; Lev. 11:47, 14:4, 20:25; Deut. 14:11, 20), specifically bullocks and oxen, cows and calves, sheep (male or female) and lambs, goats (male or female) and kids. Pigeons and doves were acceptable only as personal burnt or sin offerings, never as thanks or praise offerings or as public offerings. Num. 28 lists several sacrifices. The bull, a substitutive offering for the sin of the Golden Calf, was offered by the entire

people on new moons and holy days, particularly on Yom Kippur, when it served as the sacrifice in the very public ritual of atonement by the high priest for the entire community. Bulls were also offered for inadvertent sin by the tribal leaders when the Tabernacle was dedicated, when the Levites were initiated, and when priests were inducted. Rams served as burnt or thanks offerings from the entire people, generally via their tribal leaders. They were offered by Nazarites but never by private individuals, who had not undertaken such vows. Kids were used in private burnt offerings but never in public ritual. Lambs were sacrificed daily as the official public offering and privately for a number of occasions, including Passover.

The red bull and its companion here resemble the red and brown cows of Pharaoh’s dream (plate 32, top right). There is also a brown quadruped with a donkeylike muzzle behind the red bull, which may be a donkey, horse, or bull. Its tail is nearly too indistinct to be seen, though it seems rather horselike.

9 Kogman-Appel 2006, 50–55, 62–64.

10 On Eve facing God in Christian art, see, for example, depictions of the creation of Eve in the mosaics in Venice, St. Mark’s, cupola, thirteenth century; New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 638, Picture Bible, France, c. 1244–1254, fol. 1vc.; New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 322–323, Guyart Desmoulins, Bible Historiale, Île-de-France, 1325, I, fol. 11v; Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS 1186, Psalter of Saint Louis and Blanche of Castille, Paris, thirteenth century, fol. 10r; London, British Library, MS Add. 47682, Holkham Bible Picture Book, England, fourteenth century, fol. 3r; and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. lat. 9584, Speculum humanæ salvationis, chap. 1, Italy, 1324, fol. 4v. See also Michelangelo’s famous version in the Sistine Chapel, c. 1511.

In a Jewish context, see the following examples in the other fourteenth-century Spanish haggadah: BL Or. 2884, fol. 2ra, and Sarajevo, National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Passover Haggadah, Aragon, c. 1320–1335, fol. 3va. An excellent comparative study is Laderman 2008.

When Noah leaves the ark, the animals that leave with him include the donkey and the two sheep, a small quadruped with a stubby tail, the image badly rubbed, a sheep at left, and, behind the donkey, a red cow and another quadruped with long backswept horns, perhaps a gazelle. The dove, with its olive branch, has alighted on the roof of the ark.

11 Folio 3r is not explicitly described as a double scene by Narkiss, but it is a depiction of events in sequence occurring in two realms, even though

the same protagonists are not repeated, as in the case of the other double scenes he recognizes (plate 28, bottom right). Narkiss 1997, 25.

On Nimrod casting Abraham into the fiery furnace, see *Genesis Rabbah* 38:13; BT *Pesahim* 118a, *Tanna DeBei Eliyahu Rabbah* 6.

- 12 Nimrod is not explicitly illustrated here, but according to BT *Avodah Zarah* 53b, it is he who commissions the building of the Tower (there called the House of Nimrod), and so the monumental vertical of the Tower parallels that of Nimrod's throne and person, the Tower a synecdoche for Nimrod himself.

There are parallels between the figures of Pharaoh and Nimrod: Nimrod, his two advisers, and two henchmen are mirrored by Pharaoh, the two midwives, Pharaoh's adviser, and the henchman who drowns the children. The difference is that while Abraham is cast into the fire, he is received and saved by two angels, whereas the anonymous male Israelite infant who is cast into the Nile simply drowns, joining another at the bottom of the river. A similar mirroring occurs in the case of the illuminations of Joseph's dream (plate 30, top left) and of Pharaoh's dream later on (plate 32, top right). If placed next to each other, these scenes would be almost exact mirrors, as they are intended to be in the narrative structure of the Bible.

On the connection between Pharaoh and Nimrod, see *Targum Pseudo Jonathan* on Gen. 16:5, which depicts Sarah describing Hagar as the "daughter of Pharaoh the son of Nimrod, who threw you [Abraham] into the furnace of fire." Obviously this does not refer to the Pharaoh of the Exodus. But the rabbis connected Nimrod with Nebuchadnezzar, whom they called the "wicked, the son of the wicked, the grandson of Nimrod the wicked" (BT *Haggigah* 13a). They understood "Pharaoh" to be a hereditary title, so if (the first) Pharaoh is Nimrod's son, then the Pharaoh of the Exodus is his many-times-great-grandson. By extension, the "son" in the statement in BT *Haggigah* can refer to the Pharaoh of the Exodus, making him the intermediate "wicked one." So one might read this passage as "[Nebuchadnezzar] the wicked, the son of [Pharaoh] the wicked, the grandson of Nimrod the wicked."

- 13 BT *Sanhedrin* 70a. Rav opines that Ham castrates him, and Shmuel says that Ham sexually abuses him; according to the *stamm'aim* (the anonymous redactors), Ham, or possibly Canaan, does both. For other sources on the putative castration/abuse of Noah, see also *Genesis Rabbah* 36:7; *Leviticus Rabbah* 17:5; and Graves and Patai 1964, 121ff.

In this illumination Noah's intact penis is clearly visible, but this is not an indication that

the authorship privileged the explanation of Shmuel over that of Rav or the *stamm'aim*; according to Sarra Lev (private correspondence, 28 May 2008), "castration," for both the rabbis and the medievals, generally refers to *castratio minor*, which emasculates by removing the testicles, leaving the penis intact.

- 14 The caption notes the aversion of the faces of the sons of Noah in an extraordinary second line, under the first line, which describes Noah's drunkenness: "*U-fneihem 'aḥoranit*" ("their faces are turned the other way") (Genesis 9:23, plate 28, top right).

For the cherubs as a barometer of sorts of the relationship between God and Israel, see BT *Yom'a* 54a: "Rabbi Katin'a said, 'When the Israelites would ascend [to the Temple] on the festival, [the priests] would roll up the curtain for them, and display for them the cherubs, who were joined together [in an embrace].' The priest would then tell them, 'Behold the loving feelings for you on the part of the Omnipresent are like the loving feelings of a male for a female.'" In the same context, Rabb'a bar Rav Shil'a describes the appearance of the *kruvim* as a "man joined in an embrace with his female companion." On the other hand, the Zohar mentions that when the Jews sinned the cherubs turned away from each other (*Zohar Terumah* 43:1). The Zohar's description of the *kruvim* turning away from each other at a time of divine disfavor may be a foil for a passage in BT *Yom'a* 54a–b, which states: "When the Babylonians entered the sanctuary, they saw the cherubs embracing one another, they took them out to the market and said: 'This is Israel whose blessings are blessings and curses are curses, are involved in such things!?' They immediately denigrated them, as the verse says, 'All their valuables were denigrated for they saw her nakedness'" (Lam. 1:8). Reading this passage through the lens of the Zohar one is given to understand that even though the *kruvim* could turn away from each other at moments of divine disfavor, here—at the lowest point in the relationship between God and Israel, with the Ark of the Covenant displayed in the marketplace—the *kruvim* remained in their embrace, testifying to the continuing covenantal relationship of the people with its deity.

- 15 This term, based on Gen. 10:25 as applied in *Mishnah Bav'a Mezi'a* 4:2 and *Sanhedrin* 10:3, is used in the text caption.
- 16 On the location of Jacob's dream, see *Pirkei De-Rabi Eliezer* 35 (Friedlander 1916, 265–266). Also see Rashi on Gen. 28:17, where he cites and attempts to reconcile the various rabbinic traditions concerning the exact location of Jacob's dream. And see R. Bahye's comments on Gen.

- 28:12, where he says, “[The ladder/stairway’s] head reached heavenwards:’ He is referring to the Temple.” R. Bahye’s influence has been shown to be considerable on Jewish iconography at this time and place; see Kogman-Appel 2004, 194. On the “upstanding” Jerusalem, see Isa. 2:2.
- 17 The suspended ram as well as the hare may be iconographic responses to the image of the Crucifixion as substitutive, atoning sacrifice. On the suspended ram at the *’Akedah*, see Poseq 1986, Bregman 1982 and 2001. On Esau’s hare, see Epstein 1997, 16–38.
- 18 In Gen. 15:13, at the “Covenant between the Pieces,” God tells Abraham, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.” Rashi on that verse maintains that the four hundred years commenced with the birth of Isaac. Accordingly, he reads the text as describing three stages: “Your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs (one hundred and ninety years as strangers in the land of Canaan) and they shall be enslaved (one hundred and twenty four years in Egypt as an enslaved nation) and oppressed (eighty-six years of oppression under the new Pharaoh), [for a total of] four hundred years.”
- 19 “Everything that happened to the patriarchs is a sign [a typological foreshadowing] for their children” (*Tanḥum’a Lekh Lekhah* 9). *Genesis Rabbah* 40:6, Naḥmanides (on Gen. 12:6), and R. Bahye (on Gen. 28:12) understand the events that happened to the Patriarchs as predictive lessons for the future of the Jewish people.
- 20 Goldschmidt 1969, 126.
- 21 Narkiss 1997, 26.
- 22 Although the particular attitudes toward Ammon and Moab were somewhat different. Deut. 23:4 explicitly states, “No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the LORD; none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of the LORD,” and Neh. 13:1–3 seems to confirm the impact of this statement. The rabbis decided that the intermarriage prohibition applied only to male, not to female, Moabites (*Mishnah Yevamot* 8:3), essentially because of the Ruth narrative. They viewed Ruth as a Moabite, as a real ancestress of David, and hence had to explain how she had entered the “congregation of the LORD.” Of course, it may be that the story was first told as an etiology for a new attitude toward Moabites, leaving biblical and rabbinic scholars to debate which came first. Moreover, R. Yehoshu’a b. Ḥananyah argued successfully against his colleagues that the law should be rescinded altogether because Sennacherib, king of Assyria, had long ago “mixed up the nations,” making positive identification of the descendants of the ancient Moabites impossible (*Mishnah Yadayim* 4:4).
- 23 For a survey of this motif and, in particular, its mystical manifestations, see Wolfson 1995.
- 24 See Rashi on Gen. 32:25, referring to *Genesis Rabbah* 77:3, 78:3.
- 25 For Israel’s subjugation to the four kingdoms, see *Tanḥum’a Va-Yezeh*, 2, and *Pirkei De-Rabi Eliezer*, chap. 25 (cited in R. Bahye and Naḥmanides on Gen. 28:12). See also Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Yesodei Ha-Torah* 7:3. On the association of Esau with Rome, see G. Cohen 1967. Neusner 1986, 73–87, esp. 76, argues that the equation does not occur until the Amoraic period. In a working paper, Adiel Schremer of Bar Ilan University cogently criticizes this view, citing Neusner’s selective use of sources (Shoham-Steiner 2004). And see Yuval 2006.
- 26 It is Narkiss’s contention that on more than one occasion the direction of the iconography in the Golden Haggadah is inverted or incorrect; Narkiss 1997, 26 [4vc], 29 [5ra], 30 [6va], 34 [8vd], 38 [10va], 45 [13rb]. On directionality and space in Jewish art, see Poseq 1985, 2000, and 2005. The rabbis specifically addressed metatemporality: “*ein me’uḥar ve’in kadum ba-Torah*” (“there is no [sequence of] earlier and later events in the Torah”). See the long list in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:12 and see also *Sifrei* 131. The medieval commentators were well aware of the issue. See, for example, Rashi (R. Solomon b. Isaac, Troyes, France, 1040–1105), on Gen. 6:3; Rashi and R. Bahye on Exod. 31:18 (Rashi based on *Tanḥum’a, Ki Tis’sa* 31); and Naḥmanides on Num. 9:1. In his commentary on BT *Pesaḥim* 6b, Rashi writes, “The Torah is not punctilious regarding the order of what came earlier and what came later.”
- 27 For the angelic identity of the “man” who meets Joseph, see Rashi on Gen. 37:15, citing *Tanḥum’a Va-Yeshiv* 2. For the appearance of angels to all the patriarchs, see *Genesis Rabbah* 84:14.
- 28 Each of the folia of the first two quires is painted only on the flesh side of the vellum, so that the hair side of the open bifolium is blank, outward hair side facing hair side. Thus, there is a painted bifolium (let us say folios 2v–3r) followed by a blank bifolium (folios 3v–4r). The originally blank bifolia are inscribed in a seventeenth-century Italian hand with a rhymed mnemonic poem on the laws of Passover with a kabbalistic commentary on various aspects of the seder; Narkiss et al. 1982: 1:58. Thus, when I refer to one illumination “backing” another, I do not mean that they are literally painted back to back. Rather, the illuminations in question back each other if one turns the pages of the manuscript two at a time, viewing only the painted pages and sandwiching the blank sides between them.

In addition to the examples cited above, note also Noah's drunkenness (plate 28, top right), in which a son does violence to his father and obviates the possibility that he will have more progeny, which backs (and finds its *tikkun*, or karmic resolution) in the *'Akedah* (plate 29, top left) in which a father is held back from doing violence to his son, thus increasing his progeny. A further example is the illustration of the fiery furnace, the fire into which Abraham is cast by Nimrod, who styled himself the King of the World (plate 28, bottom left), which backs the illumination of Jacob's ladder, through which Jacob's consciousness ascends to allow him to encounter the actual cosmocrator (plate 29, lower left). The scene of the *'Akedah*, moreover, closes on the scene of another trial, that of Jacob's wrestling with an angel (plate 30, top right). Joseph's admonishment by his father, wherein he is warned to be modest and to avoid overreaching (plate 30, bottom right), is back to back with the incident where Joseph proves himself to have heeded his father's command in his encounter with the wife of Potiphar (plate 31, bottom left). Scenes that back each other are not only scenes in which some *tikkun* is effected. Sometimes they show direct consequences for a particular action. The illustration of Joseph setting out to visit his brothers at Shekhem at his father's command, for instance (plate 30, bottom left), backs the one showing Jacob's grief and tearing of garments at the result of his misguided command to Joseph (plate 31, bottom right).

29 This split frame in the penultimate folio of the Genesis group, with its depictions of Joseph and Potiphar's wife and the dreams of the butler and baker, utilizes these dramatic turning points to herald the impending end of the Genesis series of illustrations. The identical formal marker—a split frame on the lower left of the penultimate folio—is repeated in the Exodus group, where the plague of darkness and the looting of Egypt represent the dramatic turning point that heralds the impending end of the Exodus series.

30 Kogman-Appel 2006, 59.

31 This is similar to the way in which the theme of the “deeds of the ancestors revisited upon their children” is promoted across the entirety of the previous bifolium via the images of angels.

32 The association between *begged* (fabric/clothing) and *beggidah* (treachery) is implied in BT *Kiddushin* 18b. See also Nahmanides on Gen. 39:9 and *Ba'al Ha-Turim* and R. Baḥye on Exod. 21:8.

33 After this, Jacob is touched only by angels, indicating that he belongs exclusively to God.

34 On water associated with tragedy versus water associated with salvation, see *Exodus Rabbah* 9:10–19, in particular: “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron’: [Exod. 7:19] R. Tanḥum taught:

Why didn't Moses himself smite the waters?
Because God said: ‘It is not proper that the waters which protected you when you were placed in the river should now be smitten by you. No, they shall be smitten by none but Aaron.’”

35 Today, Genesis 48:15–16 is repeated each Sabbath eve when parents bless their children, but this is a relatively late development for which there does not seem to be evidence from Spain in this period. For Ashkenaz, see *Minhagei Warmaisa* 1992 1:35, n.11, and *Siddur HaGeonim* 1972, 5:76.

36 For the use of the normal plural *zefardey'im* to indicate many frogs, see Ex. 7:27–29, 8:1, 3–7, 8 and 9, and Ps. 105:30. The only other use of the singular *zefardey'a* for the plural is Ps. 78:45, which describes this incident. For the single frog disgorging the entire host of frogs, see BT *Sanhedrin* 67b, *Exodus Rabbah* 10:14, *Tanḥum'a, Va-Yer'a* 14. On disgust as an important element in inter-religious polemic in Spain, see Cuffel, 2007.

37 Mellinkoff 1993: 1:119–133, 164–168, relevant plates, and *passim*.

38 The only distinction between Israelites and Egyptians is that the Egyptians appear more often with covered heads, perhaps an indication of court behavior, whereas the visitors bare their heads as a sign of respect. The downplaying of suffering in our manuscript resembles the general iconographic tendency of BL Or. 1404, and stands in contrast to that of the Rylands Haggadah.

39 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 10525, St. Louis Psalter, Paris, 1252–1270, fol. 31v. For a similarly dignified Pharaoh, see also New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 638, fol. 8r, 8v.

40 Pharaoh's scepter plays a central role in the rhythm across the entire bifolium that is created by a panoply of sticks and staves, similar to the rhythm created by the various garments that form a circle in the center of folio 6v (plate 31). Moses' shepherd's staff leans conspicuously against his knee in plate 35, top right; at top left he bears a spear. The staff has turned into a serpent when he appears before the elders at bottom right. Opposite this, his staff is displayed on a parallel with—and accordingly iconographically corresponding to—Pharaoh's scepter. In plate 36, top right, the “taskmaster of the people” carries a short staff, and the “treader of the mortar” works the mire with his staff. At top left the taskmaster carries a staff. Then there is the staff turned serpent again at bottom right, in the same location on the folio as in plate 35; and finally, Aaron again carries the staff as he initiates the plague of blood. Note also that the staves are generally held in the “proper” positions for each of the plagues indicating the source of the plague—whether an “upper” or a “lower” sign, as discussed by Ibn 'Ezra on Exod. 7:9.

- 41 The depiction of Aaron's serpent swallowing those of the magicians is another instance of the iconography depicting an event not present in the text. Exod. 7:12 indicates that it was Aaron's reconstituted *rod* that swallowed up the *rods* of the Egyptian magicians, to heighten the miraculous effect of the proceedings. It is this text, in fact, that is quoted by the captioner. Although it is more naturalistic and rationalistic to conceive of a serpent devouring other serpents (in fact, the Hebrew text describes Aaron's rod as turning into a *tanin* [some sort of superserpent or dragon]; cf. Gen. 1:21, Ps. 148:7, Ezek. 29:3, and see Epstein 1997, 70–95) the text explicitly portrays Aaron's *rod* as swallowing the other *rods*. Both Naḥmanides, the champion of midrash, and 'Ibn 'Ezra, the rationalist philosopher, note that it is not Aaron's serpent but his reconstituted rod that indeed swallows not the serpents but the rods of the Egyptians. Both commentators describe this as a double miracle. The illumination accords with the view of R. Baḥye on Exod. 7:12. He agrees that the rods remained rods but maintains that to the eye it seemed that they had been transformed into serpents. He says that what is described in the verse—Aaron's rod swallowing those of the magicians—is not what Pharaoh and his courtiers saw, but what actually happened. By this he implies that what Pharaoh and his courtiers actually witnessed was a more “natural” miracle: Aaron's serpent swallowing those of the magicians. It seems that the authorship of the Golden Haggadah, as if to acknowledge that manuscript illumination, being a visual medium, can depict things only as they *appear*, presents the scene as it was visible to the eye, assuming, in effect, a “Pharaoh's-eye view.” Alternatively, it may be that it was simply easier to paint a serpent devouring other serpents than to paint a rod swallowing other rods. In that case, the illumination would be an instance in which technical artistic expediency trumps general authorial ideological leanings.
- 42 This aversive gesture is found only in three other cases in the manuscript: Aaron repeats it in plate 37, top left, as he pushes a lice-ridden donkey out of his way, and in plate 38, top right, in order to avoid being sprinkled with the ash from the furnace that produces the plague of boils. In the cases of both Pharaoh and Aaron, the gesture seems to be one of disgust, avoidance, and separation. In this light it is possible to understand the first occurrence of this gesture, made by Moses as he talks to Pharaoh (plate 36, bottom right), as being employed there not so much to indicate Moses' recoiling from the serpent (which is by now familiar to him) but rather to telegraph his implicit disdain for Pharaoh and the Egyptians. He is shown instinctively drawing his cloak around himself to separate himself from them. Pharaoh's gestures, by way of contrast, progress from relaxed (holding his foot casually, plate 35, lower left) to disconcerted (letting go of the foot to point at the snakes, plate 36, lower right) to disgusted (drawing his cloak around himself to shield himself from the blood-filled Nile, plate 36, lower left).
- 43 Rashi on Exod. 8:17 lists the beasts in question as “a mélange of all kinds of vicious creatures, and serpents and scorpions.” 'Ibn 'Ezra lists lions, wolves, bears, and panthers. Narkiss lists the creatures depicted in 12v as a squirrel, a dog, a lion, a wolf, and a griffin (Narkiss 1997, 42). They look to me like a squirrel, a wildcat, a bear (its body is partially hidden, but one can tell from its feet, which, with their long, almost humanlike toes, conform to the bestiary examples of bears, for which see Cambridge: Library, University, MS Ii.4.26, Bestiary, England, 1200–1210, fol. 13v; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 151, fol. 17r; Aberdeen, University Library MS 24, Bestiary, England, c. 1200, fol. 15r; London: Library, British Library, MS Roy. 2 B.VII, Bestiary, England, c. 1300; Queen Mary's Psalter, England, 1310–1320, fol. 130v; The Hague, Museum Meermanno, MS MMW, 10 B 25, Bestiary, France, c. 1450, fol. 11v), a lion, an unidentifiable animal, and a dragon. The animals are, in any case, almost certainly configured in a hierarchy from the weakest (the squirrel at top, somewhat comically transformed into a killer rodent) to the sublimely fearsome (represented by the dragon at the bottom).
- 44 The dead sheep and goat are here depicted being lowered out of a tower (that is, an interior space), corroborating the exegetical opinion of R. Baḥye on Exod. 9:3. R. Baḥye indicates that the phrase “livestock in the fields” is merely a common expression; because it mentions animals that are out in the field, it does not mean that those that were inside were safe from the plague. In the opinion of R. Baḥye, all the animals of the Egyptians, in fact, died. Though his scriptural commentary postdates the illustrations of our manuscript, it is interesting to note that Abarbanel (Don Isaac Abarbanel, 1437–1508) concurs, explaining that the Egyptians then purchased more animals from foreigners in the land, and from outside the land, thus explaining how there were animals remaining to be destroyed by the hail, or mares to pull the chariots in which Pharaoh pursued the Israelites at the Exodus. R. Baḥye's explanation is in contradiction to Rashi's opinion (see Exod. 9:10). He asserts that only the “livestock in the fields” died, but those that were kept indoors survived. R. Baḥye does cite Rashi's explanation in his commentary on Exod. 14:7, but he does so there in order to

make another (polemic) point. In any event, in the case of this illumination, the authorship again clearly votes in favor of a particular exegetical opinion by creating an iconography to support it.

On the stance of the mourning man at right as an appropriation of the image of St. John from Crucifixion iconography, see E. Cohen 1991, 189. Cohen's cogent observation that the mourning man at right resembles the mourning St. John may speak to a polemic dimension of this image that, perhaps along with the other images of suspended sheep in the manuscript, responds to Crucifixion iconography.

45 As explicitly stated in Exod. 4:22–23. There is a further formal connection between the tower in this illumination and the Tower of Babel and the towers depicted in the illuminations of the Israelite slaves building Pharaoh's store cities (plates 28, top left, and 36, top). The Egyptians are being implicitly connected with the Generation of Division and its violence (Gen. 11:1–9), and the cities that the Israelites built for them (Exod. 1:11) have now become charnel houses.

46 Contrast this, for instance, with the depiction of the Egyptian livestock in New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M. 638, Picture Bible, France, c. 1244–1254, fol. 8v, where a sheep and a goat clearly appear on the ground.

47 Concerning Pharaoh's barefootedness, compare the Rylands Haggadah, folio 17r, where Pharaoh and his advisers are also depicted with bare feet. But in the Rylands Haggadah, the *dëshabillement* is extended to bare legs; moreover, as I shall emphasize, dogs lick their wounds, stripping Pharaoh and his advisers of their dignity in a much more explicit manner.

On the debilitation of the magicians, see Nahmanides (Exod. 9:11). "The magicians were unable to confront Moses: They were shamed and humiliated, being covered with boils. They could not even save themselves, so there was no point in their coming to the king's palace, or confronting Moses outdoors. They remained shut up at home"; (translation from Carasik 2005, 57). The authorship of the Golden Haggadah has, nonetheless, added them to this scene in order to compound the image of Egyptian impotence it so meticulously develops in these illuminations.

48 On the searing heat of the boils, cf. Rashi and Nahmanides on Exod. 9:9.

49 Ibn 'Ezra on Exod. 9:11.

50 Lk. 4:23.

51 Concerning the lack of mediation in the case of this plague, R. Bahye cites *Exodus Rabbah* 12:6, which indicates that the plague came with the authorization of God and the Supernal Court. In the illumination in the Golden Haggadah, Moses'

prayer is directed toward the blue firmament representing the divine presence, which also appears in plates 27, 29, and 35, junctures where divine speech or divine intervention is intimated. The juxtaposition of this image with plate 38, top left, further confirms the identity of this firmament as representing the divine presence, not merely the sky: at top right, Moses throws the ash "toward the sky" (Exod. 9:8), but this firmament does not appear in the illumination. Compare the similar cloud in the depiction of Moses and Aaron at prayer in Birds' Head Haggadah, plate 7. On the special mediative effort of Moses here, see Bahye b. 'Asher 'ibn Hala'awa 1966, 2:65.

52 On falcons in light and darkness, see Glasier 2006, 94ff.

8. Women Hidden in Plain Sight

1 This enslavement/redemption narrative comprises a mere three verses constituting the "*bikkurim* (First-Fruits) declaration" of Deuteronomy 26:5–8, and a very brief rabbinic exegesis of those verses (Goldschmidt 1969, 120–123). These are the parts of the haggadah text as recited on *Shabbat Ha-Gadol*, the Sabbath before Passover. To these, Rabbah Gamliel is credited with adding the requirement that the three ritual elements of Passover eve—*Pessah* (the Paschal sacrifice), *mazah*, and *maror* (bitter herbs)—must also be discussed at the seder, but he did not claim that this recitation is part of *sippur yezi'at Mizrayim*. See Goldschmidt 1969, 51–53, text on 125, and see Tabory 1996, 359–361. This narrative came to be surrounded by a surprisingly short compendium of texts that contextualize and amplify it. By the date of the Golden Haggadah's creation in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, the haggadah consisted of the following elements: there was a preamble to the core narrative, consisting of some short discourses concerning *who* must discuss the Exodus, *how extensively* it must be discussed (with an example of the merits of expounding upon its recounting—the five rabbis of Bnei Brak), *the tone* of the discussion (with a typology of four ways of teaching the Exodus narrative—the four "sons"), and *when* it must be discussed. This was followed by an "historical" introduction, describing the idolatrous past of the Israelites, and celebrating the foreordination of both the Egyptian enslavement and the subsequent redemption from the time of God's covenant with Abraham. This, in turn, flowed into a three-line summary of Patriarchal history from Abraham to Jacob, culminating in praise to God for standing by the terms of the covenant. Then came the core verses of the "*bikkurim* declaration" with their brief rabbinic exegesis, and the *piyyut Dayyenu*. For a

cogent discussion of the development of the seder, and an analysis of the accretion of the included texts over time, see Goldschmidt 1969; Kasher 1960; and, particularly, Tabory 1996, 350–384. On redemption by God and “none other,” see Goldschmidt 122, 8–9.

- 2 Most illuminated haggadot also contain scenes of the contemporary enactment of the rituals of Passover eve.
- 3 For a survey of the manuscript haggadah after the advent of printing, see Benjamin 1983. A fuller study is still a desideratum.
- 4 For instance, since there is an entire group of fourteenth-century Spanish haggadot that includes only scenes from Exodus, the choice of the authorship of the Golden Haggadah to include Genesis scenes is, in and of itself, “narratologically excessive.” Thus all the Genesis scenes are susceptible to interrogation for potential contextual meaningfulness.
- 5 Representative of the “Exodus only” class are the so-called Hispano-Moresque Haggadah (London, British Library, MS Or. 2737, Passover Haggadah, Castile, late thirteenth century), the Rylands Haggadah and BL Or. 1404, the Parma Haggadah (Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS 2411, Passover Haggadah, Castile, late thirteenth century), the Bologna-Modena Mahzor (two fragments, one in Bologna Biblioteca Universitaria, MS 2559, the other in Modena, Biblioteca Estense, cod. A-K 1 22—Or. 92, Mahzor, Catalonia, first half of the fourteenth century), and the Kaufmann Haggadah (Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Kaufmann collection, MS A 422, Passover Haggadah, Catalonia, second half of the fourteenth century).

Surviving examples of the “Exodus plus Genesis” group include the Sister Haggadah (London, BL Or. 2884, Passover Haggadah, Catalonia, c. 1320–1330), the Sarajevo Haggadah (Sarajevo, National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Passover Haggadah, Aragon, c. 1320–1335), and the Prato Haggadah (New York, Jewish Theological Seminary Library, MS 9478, Passover Haggadah, Spain, c. 1300).

Some scholars assume that the configuration that illustrates Exodus scenes exclusively was the earliest type, with the “Genesis-inclusive” manuscripts developed under the influence of French Bible and Psalter illustrations (cf. Narkiss 1970, text volume passim). Of the haggadot with Genesis and Exodus cycles, only the Sarajevo and Prato haggadot begin with scenes depicting creation. The Golden Haggadah, as noted, commences with a depiction of Adam naming the animals, and the Sister Haggadah shows the angels assisting in the creation of Adam.

- 6 This is not to imply that each illuminated Spanish haggadah does not evince its own particular type of interest in women. The Sarajevo Haggadah, for instance, includes a remarkable illustration of Rebecca giving birth (Sarajevo, National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Passover Haggadah, Aragon, c. 1320–1335, fol. 9v).
- 7 My theory that plate 40, lower left, represents preparations for the restored Passover sacrifice is based both on the possible halakhic impermissibility of the consumption of lamb/sheep/mutton at the Passover seder (*Mishnah Pesahim* 4:4, JT *Pesahim* 28a, Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hamez U-Mazah* 8:11, *Shullhan 'Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 476:1, *Tur Orah Hayyim* 476, and Tabory 1996, 92–105, particularly 103–105) and on the fact that the text caption reads, “they prepare the necessities of the Passover” (*osin zrikhei ha-Pessah*) rather than “they prepare for Passover” or “they prepare for the Seder eve,” or a similar construction. The fact that these preparations take place in fourteenth-century Catalan interiors, and that, besides the slaughtering, they include *hagalat kelim*, the boiling of Passover dishes, does not detract from my contention; the biblical scenes are all depicted in fourteenth-century interiors as well, and the authorship no doubt recognized and wished to stress that Passover preparations—down to the boiling of Passover dishes—would continue even when the Passover sacrifice was restored (cf. BT *Berakhot* 34b: “There will be no difference [in the observance of religious law] between the current age and the Messianic Era except for [our emancipation from our] subjugation to the nations”).
- 8 Similar questions may be asked about the scene of Moses’ family’s “flight into Egypt” (plate 35, top left). Why does a donkey dominate the scene? Why should Zipporah be so prominent? In this case, as I shall demonstrate, it may be an attempt to elevate a relatively peripheral scene to critical status, and in so doing, to focus on Zipporah.
- 9 See the use of “house” as a euphemism for “wife” in *Mishnah Yom'a* 1:1, BT *Yom'a* 13a, and BT *Shabbat* 118b. This usage does not explain why three women appear in this illumination, and why one of them is crowned, but I will deal with that question below. Moreover, with reference to the lice: while the “houses” of the Egyptians are mentioned in connection with the frogs (Exod. 7:28), the *arov*, the swarms (Exod. 8:20), and the locusts (Exod. 10:6), there is no use of the word “houses” in the plague of lice. Accordingly, it is difficult to demonstrate an exegetical meaning for the incidental presence of the Egyptian women struck by the plague of lice.
- 10 I am indebted to Tova Weitzman for her grammatical insights into this difficult inscription, and

- to Haym Soloveitchick for reassuring me that the grammar is indeed confused and hence confusing, and that no one of the explanations I have offered seems any more or less plausible than any other.
- 11 See Wolfthal 2004, 68–84. For the association of Yael with the matriarchs, see BT *Nazir* 23b.
 - 12 Although “crossing the Jabbok” as a euphemism for death does not seem to be present in rabbinic literature, overtones of narrow escape from death are indeed present in Gen. 27:31 (Esau’s threat to kill Jacob); Gen. 32:12 (Jacob’s prayer for deliverance from Esau’s threat); as well as Gen. 23:12, illuminated here. Accordingly, the iconography may be an exegesis of this narrative as euphemistic or typological for Jacob’s salvation and that of his family. Certainly, the idea of “crossing the Jabbok” was employed in just such a manner by 1626, when it is used as the title for R. Aaron Berekhiah of Modena’s work on burial and mourning customs (*Ma’avar Yabbok*). The full title reads, “The book ‘Crossing the Jabbok,’ describing the matter of the narrow crossing that connects this world with the next.” Goldberg 1996, 88, maintains that the Jabbok is “a direct allusion to the notion of the purifying river of fire,” conflating the Jabbok with the River Dinur (the river of fire in BT *Haggigah* 13b and JT *Haggigah* 2.2, 77d), but I can locate no texts that substantiate this conflation. What R. Aaron Berekhiah himself says of the title is that Jabbok (YBK) is an acronym for *yihud*, *berakhah*, and *kedushah*: union (with the divine), blessing, and holiness. For it is with these that “we will cross over the Ford of the Jabbok in order to wrestle with the LORD,—who is a “man of war”—“until dawn,” which is resurrection. Then “[you shall be] no longer [called] Jacob” shall one say to his soul and his body, “only Israel” for we shall be “a kingdom of priests” and we shall be worthy of seeing God face to face, for the sun will shine upon us with charity and healing” (Aaron Berekhiah b. Moses of Modena 1995, 17).
 - 13 The depiction of Moses’ family’s “flight into Egypt,” for instance (plate 35, top left), evokes an instance of salvation. Here it is not the salvation of a woman, but occurs at the hands of a woman. In Exod. 4:24–26, Zipporah takes the initiative to save Moses from God’s attempt on his life by circumcising one of her sons (the text does not specify which) and throwing his bloodied foreskin at Moses’ feet. This part of the incident is not shown here, perhaps because it is quite a violent and bloody scene, the sort of thing that authorship of the Golden Haggadah tended to avoid. But it is present in both BL Or. 1404 (fig. 81) and the Rylands Haggadah (fig. 80). The presence of Zipporah with the children here *implies* the scene of the circumcision, even while the courtly poli-
 tesse of the authorship causes it to politely resist the depiction of the bloody deed.
 - 14 The plural “daughters” in Gen. 37:35 are presumably Dina and his daughters-in-law. R. Bahye on this verse identifies the “daughters” as Dina and Serah, daughter of Asher. Rashi quotes *Genesis Rabbah* 84:21 to the effect that these were either Jacob’s Canaanite daughters-in-law, or that each of the brothers had a twin sister whom he married. In any case, there is only one woman depicted here, and she is connected with Jacob, not with the brothers.
 - 15 Kogman-Appel cites Gabrielle Sed Rajna’s contention that *Pirkei De-Rabi Eliezer* describes Jacob’s concubine Bilhah as having raised Joseph after the death of Rachel. Sed Rajna provided no citation for the *Pirkei De-Rabi Eliezer* reference, and this account of Bilhah as foster mother does not appear in either the standard edition or in Higger. *Genesis Rabbah* 84:11, however, does assert that Bilhah had raised Joseph like a son. In asserting that the motif is “of probable midrashic background,” Kogman-Appel tentatively situates its origins in Jewish texts, ideas, and narratives that may have influenced early Christian art. As she generally takes pains to distance herself from the Weitzmann/Narkiss model of recension and prototype reconstruction, she stops short of ascribing the motif to a putative lost monument of ancient Jewish art that influenced the early Christian examples (Kogman-Appel 2006, 47–48).
 - 16 Weitzmann and Kessler 1986, fig. 366; Demus 1984, 2 (fig. 256).
 - 17 Kogman-Appel 2006, 56.
 - 18 See Kenaan-Kedar 1996.
 - 19 On the piecemeal nature of the appropriation of the Santa Restituta iconography see Kogman-Appel 2006, 56–57. One might conjecture that the Golden Haggadah depiction is a conflation of the scene of the brothers bringing the bloodied coat with the slightly later scene of Jacob’s mourning and refusal of comfort. But in that later scene in the biblical text, as I have noted, it is not one, but several “daughters” who appear, and they are not described as mourning, but rather as attempting to get Jacob to cease his own mourning. This image—of a single woman, who is clearly mourning—is a different one altogether, one that is sanctioned neither by scripture nor by midrash.
 - 20 *JPS*. See Rashi on Gen. 37:10. Rachel’s legendary “immortality,” of course, parallels that of Jacob himself, of whom it is said (BT *Ta’anit* 5b), “Jacob our father never died [or, “is not dead].”
 - 21 See Rashi on Gen. 48:8 and Radak on Jer. 31:14, with extensive midrashic quotation.
 - 22 On Shutelah the Ephraimite, see Num. 26:35–36. The midrashim concerning the baby in the brick

mold attach themselves to two scriptural loci: the “cry for help from the bondage” that “rose up before God” in Exod. 2:23, and the “pavement of sapphire” (*livnat ha-sappir*) described as resting under the feet of God in Exod. 24:10. Some commentaries understand the word *livnat* as relating to the word *levey nah* (brick) and explain that the “brick” beneath God’s feet (or throne or footstool) is a brick in which was interred an aborted child born to a (nameless) Israelite woman who gave birth while treading the straw into the clay; see *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Exod. 24:10. The *Apocalypse of Baruch* (Baruch 3) 3:3–5 imagines an identical incident there described as occurring during the building of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:3) and associates the brick beneath the divine throne with that narrative. (Incidentally, the imputation that this horrific episode could have as easily taken place under the jurisdiction of Nimrod, when building his edifice, or under Pharaoh when building his further cements the relationship between these two evil characters; see above.

Pirkei De-Rabi Eliezer 48 first describes “Pharaoh’s executioners” as suffocating Israelites by immuring them in the walls of buildings, whence they groaned, and God heard and responded to them. *Sefer HaYashar* also includes a version of this tale (*Sefer HaYashar* 1986, 305). *Pirkei De-Rabi Eliezer* 48 also includes the account of the brick beneath the feet of God, and is the first text to give a name—Rachel, the granddaughter of Shutelah— to the woman who loses her child. See *Yalkut Shimoni* to Exod. 15: 243—which calls the woman “Rachel the daughter of Shutelah”—turns the episode into a contest between the angel of Egypt and Michael and Gabriel, protectors of Israel.

Ḥizkuni on Exod. 24:10 repeats the narrative, making Rachel the granddaughter of “Metushelah” (Methusaleh) rather than Shutelah. The variations in these texts are interesting and worthy of further consideration. Narkiss describes this illustration as “based on *Exodus Rabbah* 5:22,” though there is no mention of this story in that locus (Narkiss 1970, 41).

- 23 This *reshut* is used among Ashkenazic Jews as a Sabbath hymn. See Levin 1976, 2:170–173, no. 308, English translation in Michaelson 2003, 56–57.
- 24 That *mazah* is associated with salvation is obvious from the haggadah text itself, cf. Goldschmidt 1969, 125. The association of *harosset*—particularly with the apples of which it is made—with fertility is rabbinic; see *Exodus Rabbah* 1:12.
- 25 On each Israelite birth in Egypt as miraculously sextuple, see *Tanḥum’a Shemot* 5, cited by Rashi on Exod. 1:7.

26 Though a great deal more has come to light concerning family life among medieval Jews (see, e.g., Baumgarten 2004), little is known about the emotional reaction to the loss of children among Jews in the Middle Ages, except in the case of persecution and martyrdom in Ashkenaz, where the distress is most often troped as a response to the particular gruesomeness of children’s deaths at their parents’ own hands. Concerning loss of children in the natural course of events—stillbirths, infant death, etc.—there is little evidence, and, as yet, not much study. My contention that the Golden Haggadah was commissioned with an eye to the memorialization of a child who had died and for the comfort of that child’s mother may be regarded as tendentious since it might be argued that stillbirth and infant death were greeted with relatively more equanimity by medieval than by modern women because of the unfortunate ubiquity of such deaths. Even so, however, there is nothing to prevent one from imagining that in particular cases the loss was felt more acutely than in others, and that such occasions might have given rise to particular types of commemoration.

9. Siblings: Identical or Fraternal?

- 1 Narkiss et al. 1982, 92, 98; Loewe 1988, 16–17; Kogman-Appel 2006, 91. Rosenau and Sed-Rajna had proposed that BL Or. 1404 was copied from the Rylands Haggadah. Narkiss, Cohen-Mushlin, and Tcherikover propose that both manuscripts have a common model since lost. Rosenau 1954; Sed-Rajna 1987, 92; Narkiss et al. 1982, 1: 98.

Although Kogman-Appel convincingly confirms the dependency of the Rylands Haggadah on BL Or. 1404, she echoes Narkiss’ assertion of the essential “sameness” of these two manuscripts: “From the point of view of iconography Rylands Haggadah follows BL Or. 1404 faithfully. Modifications are rare; in most cases the iconography is nearly identical. Divergences normally do not exceed those mentioned above” (Kogman-Appel 2006, 91). I would argue that insistence that manuscripts or iconographic motifs “do not differ in significant ways” should always be closely examined because such manuscripts *do* differ, and that what is “significant” is an entirely subjective opinion of the investigator. Assertions of essential congruity generally prove to be red flags, alerting one to the possibility that there may, in fact, be major and significant differences between the monuments or details.

- 2 Kogman-Appel 2006, 227.
- 3 Narkiss et al. 1982, 1:95.
- 4 Interestingly, in the full-page illustration depicting the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the numbers diverge somewhat and the tops of bodies don’t

- accord with the legs (plate 60). Counting heads, the Israelites tally twenty-four (plus Moses and Aaron), but there appears to be an “extra” set of legs in the far left of the lower register. In the corresponding illumination in the Rylands Haggadah, the figures number twenty-two (plate 61). The rather crowded “environment” of the page in BL Or. 1404 as compared with the Rylands Haggadah, and the other instances of twelve figures constituting the collectivity of *bnei Yisra’el* in BL Or. 1404, lead one to conjecture that the authorship intended twenty-four (a neat multiple of twelve) here. Regarding the “extra” legs: the artist seems originally to have painted twenty-five figures, and (as in the case of the emendation of the animals in the depiction of the murrain in plate 50, bottom), the iconography was emended to depict exactly twenty-four Israelites. The Rylands Haggadah figures are much less ambiguous to read, and there is no doubt that the authorship intended twenty-two and not twenty-three, twenty-four, or twenty-five figures.
- 5 Eight cloaked figures, which seem to represent women, do appear in the Rylands Haggadah in the scene of the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn (fig. 64), but this is the only context in which they appear.
 - 6 A woman appears among the mourning Egyptians during the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn (plate 56, top; fig. 63). As I shall demonstrate, she relates (due to her position on the page) to the Israelite woman shown in the scene of the looting of Egypt in the lower register of the same folio (plate 56, bottom).
 - 7 “*Ha-’am*” can also be translated as “the nation,” but JPS consistently prefers “the people.” Kaddari 2006, 805:1, has *’am* as an *ethnos* or nation, but *ha-’am* as a designation for Israelites generally (805:2). The use of *ha-’am* in a negative context is seen in various episodes where the Israelites show lack of trust in divine providence; cf. Exod. 15:24, 32:1, and see Kaddari 2006, 805:2. On *bnei Yisra’el*, see Kaddari 2006, 109–110:1.
 - 8 But the omission of either term in the captions can also be significant. In BL Or. 1404 folio 2v, for instance, the word *ha-’am* is dropped from a verse that should have included it. The illumination depicts Moses and Aaron performing the “signs” before the Israelite elders and the people. The captioner of the parallel scene in the Rylands Haggadah (folio 14b) quotes part of Exod. 4:30: “Aaron . . . performed the signs in the sight of the people [*ha-’am*] . . . and they bowed low in homage.” The captioner of BL Or. 1404, by way of contrast, begins with the previous verse, Exod. 4:29: “Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites [*bnei Yisra’el*].” The caption then continues with Exod. 4:30: “and he performed the signs in the sight of . . .” interestingly dropping the word “the people [*ha-’am*].” This omission did not elude the later transcriber of the captions, who includes them, as well as the middle of Exod. 4:30 (“Aaron repeated all the words”). The omission is ostensibly due to lack of space, but it is notable that here in BL Or. 1404, in contrast to the Rylands Haggadah caption, the captioner *added* Exod. 4:29, which uses the term *bnei Yisra’el*.
 - 9 Just as the illustrations can sometimes be read against the text captions to emphasize particular points, the captions can also be read against the illustrations in order to make such points. In the depiction of Aaron performing the “signs” for the elders and the Israelites, the Rylands Haggadah folio 14b includes Moses and Aaron and twelve “Israelites” (the only instance in the Rylands Haggadah in which the collectivity of the Israelites numbers exactly twelve). The caption reads against the illustration by designating this collectivity as “*ha-’am*.” BL Or. 1404 folio 2v includes Moses and Aaron and eight “Israelites” (the only instance in BL Or. 1404 in which the collectivity of the Israelites numbers anything other than twelve). The caption reads against the illustration by designating them *bnei Yisra’el*. The interplay between contra-iconographic and contratextual reading to make the same points consistently is quite sophisticated.
 - 10 Although the word *ha-’am* is not here specified in the text caption that accompanies the illustration, which consists of labels paraphrasing scripture, rather than a direct scriptural quotation. From right: “The intensification of the labor,” “Taskmaster,” “And they are gathering stubble,” “Bricks.”
 - 11 Here, the captions are explicit. The conceptual distinction between *bnei Yisra’el* and *ha-’am* is often—but not unfailingly—reflected in the captions, which, while usually consistent with the ideological program of the authorship, sometimes must employ whatever source text is available.
 - 12 This *schadenfreude* is evident in the depiction of the plague of beasts, as I have noted. Likewise, whereas in the illustration of the hail in BL Or. 1404 (plate 52, bottom), the Israelite shepherd points to his safe flock, in the Rylands Haggadah he points mockingly at the suffering Egyptian shepherd (plate 53, bottom). On mockery and disgust in polemic, see Cuffel 2007. The Rylands depiction of the plague of beasts is discussed on 213–14.
 - 13 It is often as important to look at what is omitted as it is to examine what is included in iconography; see Kogman-Appel 2000.
 - 14 In the Rylands Haggadah Pharaoh is granted a

sword on one occasion, where he is shown riding out to the Nile on horseback, a plausible context for wearing a sword (plate 47, bottom). Otherwise, he is consistently disempowered. He in fact appears crownless and with a lapdog, in contrast to BL Or. 1404 in which he wears a crown (plates 47, top; 46, top).

- 15 The plague of blood occurs outdoors. This, as I have noted, is a plausible setting in which a king might go about armed. Also, because this is the very first plague, there seems to be a desire to depict Pharaoh still under the illusion that his will is his own, as is evident in the contrast between his relaxed, cross-legged stance in the depiction of his first audience with Moses and Aaron (plate 44, top [compare Golden Haggadah, fig. 52]), in which he bears a sword, and his less relaxed bearing in the depiction of his second encounter with them (the incident of the serpents, plate 46, top) where his legs are no longer crossed and he does not bear a sword. In the case of the plague of beasts (plate 50, top), the omission of a sword is for compositional reasons: giving Pharaoh a sword would have been visually confusing owing to the long verticals of the beasts all over his body that are the central focus of the illustration. In the case of the plague of lice, it is also pragmatic; Pharaoh requires his hands to scratch the lice that are covering his body (plate 48, bottom).
- 16 Concerning Pharaoh's agency in the case of the plague of the firstborn, see the contrasting opinion of Nahmanides on Exodus 14:4. This demonstrates that while iconographic exegesis often parallels the views of the commentators, it can also be independent of them.
- 17 Narkiss et al. 1982, 96.
- 18 The roots of this attitude may be found, for example, in BT *Shabbat* 67a, 111a/b, and 128a. For medieval and later recensions of this self-perception, particularly as it applies in Spain and the manner in which its assimilation by historians has colored historiography, see Marcus 1985, Efron 1993, Schorsch 1994, and Endelman 1996.
- 19 Of course, this is problematic in and of itself: First of all, any retelling in any medium situates itself at some distance from the "primary" narrative. Then, of course, the integrity of that "primary" narrative, or the very fact that there can even be "a" narrative, can be deconstructed on various postmodern theoretical grounds.
- 20 See *Midrash Tanhum'a* 1885, paras. 11, 52, and *Midrash Va-Yosh'a* in A. Jellinek 1853, para. 48. Compare *Mekhilt'a B'o*, Lauterbach 2004, 13, 13b.
- 21 Even in the case of the animals, the authorship was not compelled, as it was in the case of the murrain, to show every possible type of animal because the text here is general ("and all the first-

born of the cattle"). Thus a single horse and a single ox become icons of "all the . . . cattle."

- 22 This last quotation of Exod. 12:30 appears directly above the figures of the dead, the eye being drawn toward it by the councilor's upraised hand.
- 23 See Rashi 1911 on Exod. 10:2.
- 24 Because the range of gestures in BL Or. 1404's illuminations is so restrained and limited, there is, in fact, some ambiguity concerning exactly who these figures are intended to represent. In the Rylands Haggadah recension, it is clear that the group of four figures at the right are the Egyptian "givers," and the balance of the figures are the Israelites. They are divided into a group of three who face the Egyptians and receive the goods, as well as a group of five who have turned their backs on the scene and are walking away toward the left with the booty. Here, the child, as mentioned, exhibits eagerness, broaching the invisible line between the Egyptians and the Israelites.

In BL Or. 1404, the grouping is less clear, and several interpretive possibilities exist. The scene may be understood as configured somewhat like the Rylands Haggadah version, with the four figures on the right representing the Egyptians, giving their property to the four Israelites at center (counting the child, who here stays clearly on the "Israelite side"). In a "Rylandsesque" reading, all the other figures on the page, including the four left-facing figures with their backs toward this group, and the woman facing right at the extreme left of the composition, would be Israelites as well.

Another option is that there are two groups of Egyptian givers and Israelite receivers, configured as follows: The first group from the right is composed of four Egyptians handing gold and silver items and a belt to the second group from the right, consisting of three adult Israelites and a child. The third group from the right (that of the four left-facing figures with their backs toward this second group) would compose another group of four Egyptian "givers," handing a cloak and a vessel to the woman at the far left, clearly an Israelite "receiver." A third possibility would identify the two rightmost groups as the Egyptians handing off the objects to the Israelites, and the two leftmost groups as Israelites spreading out and examining the property. The last and most radical alternative is that there are no Egyptians shown here at all, but simply Israelites spreading out and examining the property they were given during the "plunder," though the act of plunder itself is never shown.

Each of these interpretations has some support in the configuration of the figures. One strong argument against the last possibility is that the

fourth figure from the right—the one who is holding a covered vessel—is dressed in a manner similar to Pharaoh’s courtier in the above illustration of the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn, as well as in the illustrations on the previous folio (plate 54). He wears a robe with wide sleeves over an undergarment tight around the forearms and ornamented with small buttons, and a separate soft-peaked hood. While many of the garments worn by Pharaoh’s courtiers are identical or equivalent to those worn by the Israelites, particularly the elders (BL Or. 1404 folio 2v), this combination—particularly the peaked hood—is found only in the dress of Pharaoh’s courtiers in BL Or. 1404. So the distinctive Egyptian garb of this figure supports the reading that there are both Egyptians and Israelites in this illumination.

The numeration of the figures and the choice of text caption may bolster the last and most extreme possibility: that all the persons depicted in this illumination are intended to represent Israelites. The figures number twelve, which, as we have seen, is associated in this manuscript with the “Children of Israel” (*bnei Yisra’el*). And, as also noted, the text caption is from Exod. 12:35: “The Israelites (lit., “Children of Israel,” *bnei Yisra’el*) had done as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold.” The group is called “Children of Israel” (*bnei Yisra’el*); no mention is made of “the people” (*ha’am*), or of “plunder,” and the scene is explicitly labeled as representing what happened after “the Israelites had done as Moses instructed.” The later owner who copied the captions on the parchment outside the margins of the drawings expanded the caption in a way that does not correspond with the original stratum of the drawing, as was his/her wont. In this case, s/he adds the words, “And God caused the favor of the people (*ha’am*) [in the eyes of Egypt].” The original captioner, however, was very careful to avoid the use of “the people” (*ha’am*) here, referring to the group only as “the Children of Israel” (*bnei Yisra’el*). Perhaps this was done specifically in order to call attention to the fact that here (as in the case of every other illustration accompanying the use of the term “Children of Israel” in BL Or. 1404) the number is twelve, and to signal by that the fact that all these figures are Israelites. And the caption—true to the quietistic spirit of BL Or. 1404—comes as reassurance that this is not a scene of plunder, but its aftermath, as the Israelites examine (rather solemnly and thoughtfully, not gleefully at all) the “gifts” they have received from the Egyptians. In this reading, the exclusively Egyptian nature of the garment worn by the fourth figure from the right might be called into question. After all, the fur-

thest figure to the left in the Rylands depiction (definitely an Israelite) wears a similar hood. Moreover, in the text of Exod. 3:22 Moses is promised by God that the Israelites will not only take, but also *wear* the clothing of the Egyptians. So perhaps this clothing was not exclusively Egyptian/Christian; even if it was, it might represent an already appropriated Egyptian garment on an Israelite body. Though this reading is more tendentious than the others, it remains within the realm of possibility. Showing only the aftermath of the looting and omitting the caption “thus, they plundered Egypt” would be consistent with the judicious attitude toward vengeance that seems to characterize BL Or. 1404.

If, however, the scene depicts Egyptians handing the goods to the Israelites, there are still several elements that distinguish it as particularly characteristic of the ethos of BL Or. 1404. The first is the restraint exhibited in the illustration: the lack of grabbing on the part of the child, the Israelites and Egyptians remaining within their individual realms. This contrasts with the eagerness the child displays in the version in the Rylands Haggadah. The second is the use of a text caption that refers to the group as “Children of Israel” (*bnei Yisra’el*), and does not make reference to the looting of the Egyptians, as opposed to the Rylands caption, which designates the group as *ha’am* (the people), and states, “thus, they looted Egypt.” Finally, the inclusion of a woman is uniquely characteristic of the BL Or. 1404 illustrations. If one accepts this conceptualization of the configuration, the issue of numeration becomes problematic. If all the figures are Israelites, they constitute the “BL Or. 1404-requisite” twelve. But if four or eight figures here are Egyptians, then this becomes a “crowd scene” with a different (and arbitrary) numeration.

25 This is the third figure from the right. He wears no armor but bears a kneading bowl on his shoulder, holding his left hand slightly above waist level, in a fist, as if steadying or balancing himself. That hand hovers some distance above his scabbard, which is obviously empty. Interestingly, the other scabbards of the armed Israelites depicted here only questionably contain swords. No pommels, at least, are depicted. One might argue that in the case of the two helmeted figures, the invisibility of the pommels is due to the intervention of the shields. Indeed, in the facing depiction of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the scabbards of the Israelites are generally topped by the pommels of swords, except for the case when the occasional shield or a hand intervenes (plate 60). In the Exodus illumination, the first figure on the right holds a small round shield, but

- it is well up and away from the empty scabbard. The second figure's shield does obscure the top of the scabbard. So the illuminators have depicted two empty scabbards and one with its top covered, making it ambiguous whether it contains a sword or not. It is difficult to determine whether this is an error on the part of the artists, or a deliberate softening of the image of the armed Israelites (plate 58, top).
- 26 Flaking paint reveals that in this illumination the dough was first painted as a twist of dough on a stick (cf. the Birds' Head Haggadah, plate 16) but painted over to represent dough trays.
- 27 Narkiss et al. 1982, 96, describes these as "church vessels," whereas the vessels in the Rylands illustrations are simply "chalices" (90). Much has been made of these objects as putative ecclesiastical vessels; Julie Harris 2002; Rubin 1999, 86. But their morphology can just as easily indicate a secular origin, and such cups are often found in haggadah illustrations depicting contemporary interiors (London: British Library, Add. MS 14762, fol. 2v).
- 28 There are at least seven weaponless figures, including four or five women (plate 60).
- 29 R. Bahye, on Exod. 14:22, quotes *Exodus Rabbah* 21:10 to the effect that it was only when Israel went "into the midst of the Sea"—that is, when the water reached their nostrils—that it split in deference to this act of trust. As I have noted, the theme of trust in God is central to the three final folia of BL Or. 1404 as well (plates 56, 58, 60).
- 30 In the case of the plagues, the salvation of the Israelites is mentioned as a sort of appendix in four of the plagues ('arov, murrain, hail, and darkness) and features prominently in only one (the slaying of the firstborn).
- 31 Narkiss notes both of the omissions, stating, in the case of the murrain, that "the live cattle of the Israelites . . . that appear in the Rylands Haggadah (folio 16v) are missing . . . [yet] . . . on the whole, [the scenes] are similar to those of the Rylands Haggadah." Concerning BL Or. 1404's depiction of the plague of darkness on folio 5v (plate 54, bottom), he writes that "unlike the depiction in the Rylands Haggadah (folio 17v), this is an abbreviated scene," but does not interpret the significance of this abbreviation (Narkiss et al. 1982, 96).
- 32 Though the Egyptians grimace a bit during the plagues of lice (plate 48, bottom), beasts (plate 50, top), and boils (plate 52, top), and, in the depiction of the latter plague, one of the courtiers is cross-eyed with discomfort, the suffering is in general less gloated over. Nowhere, for instance, in BL Or. 1404 does one encounter the dogs of the Egyptians licking their sores as in the Rylands Haggadah (plate 53, top; fig. 77). The artists of BL Or. 1404 were better, in general, at depicting emotion in facial features, the pathos of which—in the case of the Egyptians—tends to heighten sympathy for the victims without making them seem to be mocked.
- 33 In the illustrations of the two other plagues in which a distinction is made between Egypt and Israel—wild beasts and hail—both the suffering of the Egyptians and the immunity of the Israelites are depicted in the manuscripts. Per Exod. 8:18–19, both the beasts that attacked the Egyptians as well as the immunity of the Israelites are rendered in both manuscripts. BL Or. 1404 4v and the Rylands Haggadah 16v each show a beleaguered Pharaoh and his courtiers facing unscathed Israelites, and a building representing Goshen. Per Exod. 9:26, both BL Or. 1404 5r and the Rylands Haggadah 17r show the Egyptian shepherds and flocks pelted by hail, in contrast to the unscathed Israelite shepherds and their flocks.
- But as the authorship of BL Or. 1404 depicts the salvation of the Israelites from the beasts and their preservation from the hail, why does it refrain from showing the dwellings of the Israelites filled with light as they are saved from the plague of darkness and from showing their livestock saved from the murrain? It seems that there is something significantly different about the essential nature of the murrain and the darkness as opposed to beasts and hail. Both the murrain and the darkness are connected with the revelation of the divine presence (*gilu'i Shekhinah*), as testified to in the commentaries, particularly that of R. Bahye. (On the cattle, see R. Bahye on Exod. 9:3, and compare *Zohar 'Emor* 90:1; on the plague of darkness, see R. Bahye on Exod. 10:21.) Because the divine presence is associated with light, what appears to the Egyptians as darkness is, in fact, a revelation of the supernal light, hidden since the first day of creation, tolerable by the Israelites, but manifest as complete darkness to the Egyptians; see Brazovski 1994, 2:73. The authorship may not have wanted to depict (even in a secondary rendition) the positive aspects of the revelation of the divine presence because such would violate the principle of imaging God exclusively through the *via negativa* (see Maimonides 1963, chaps. 58–59). In other words, they felt comfortable depicting the proximate results of the revelation of the divine presence: the death of sheep and cows (cf. Exod. 34:3) and darkness for humans who cannot perceive the supernal light. But there is no permissible visual metaphor for the positive consequences of that revelation. Discomfort— theological, technical, or both— with the idea of rendering supernal light precipitated the omission.

10. Iconography in Dialogue

- 1 This chapter is a reworking and expansion of my earlier article in Frojmovic 2002b, 33–52.
- 2 Narkiss 1997, 11.
- 3 Narkiss 1997, 57, claims: “This rendering resembles the traditional iconography of the Flight into Egypt with Mary carrying Christ on a donkey led by Christ’s step-brother, the youth James, and accompanied by the bearded Joseph.” He, however, offers no citations of illuminations featuring James. This inclusion, if it occurs at all, is not so common as Narkiss implies. A survey of examples in the *Princeton Index of Christian Art* reveals only a handful during this period in which this detail appears.
- 4 On Jewish disgust regarding celibacy, see Berger 1979, sec. 42 (Eng. 69–70, Heb. 29–30); see also sec. 209 (Eng. 205, Heb. 144). On preternatural fertility, see *Midrash Tanhuma* and *Yalkut Shimoni* on Exod. 1:7, where each pregnancy during the Egyptian enslavement is said to have produced six children at a time. Nahmanides points out that while one of Moses’ sons, Gershom, had been born at the time of this narrative, the other, Eliezer, was born on the way to Egypt or back in Egypt. The artist makes an interesting assertion about the fertility of Moses and the integrity of family here by showing both children in this illumination. See Nahmanides 1971, 2:51–53.
- 5 In Christian art of the later fourteenth and particularly in the fifteenth century, Joseph often appears as a bitter and rejected old man in the background (Boucicaud Master, London, BL MS Add. 16977, Book of Hours, Paris, first quarter of the fifteenth century, fol. 57r), a dried-up, impotent old codger (Virgin and Child with St. Joseph, Follower of Bernaert Van Orley, c. 1510, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum), or a fat, drunken knave (London, BL MS Add. 11575, *Speculum humanae salvationis*, Middle Dutch, c. 1400, fol. 25r). He is often made the butt of visual jokes about infertility (Master of Frankfurt, 1503–1506, Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie). For further examples of these topoi, see Mellinkoff 1993, 1:79–82, 142–144, 222–227, and relevant plates.

On Joseph as a subsidiary or sad character, see, for example, Rome, Vatican Library MS Cod. Vat. Lat. 3548, fol. 8r; Mellinkoff 1993, pl. VI.70; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek MS Clm. 14528, fol. 2r. St. Bridget of Sweden (c. 1303–1373) in her influential *Revelations*, in which she recorded her visions of the Nativity and other events in the life of Jesus, makes Joseph completely peripheral to that scene—not present, in fact, until after the event. But by the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, theologians such as Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444) and Jean Gerson (1363–1429), chancellor of Notre Dame

and the University of Paris, considerably amplified Joseph’s significance in Christian theology. See Black 2006, 23.

- 6 Falconry in particular seems to have been associated with love. See Friedman, M., 1989, 157–186, where literature is also discussed.
- 7 On Jewish use of indigenous typology in Spain, see Funkenstein 1993, 98–100.
- 8 On the concept of *lex militans* (my term), here extrapolated into *synagoga militans*, see Epstein 1997, 39–69.
- 9 On the hare hunt as a symbol for the persecution of Jews, see Epstein 1997, 16–38. Regarding dogs and hares, *caveat explanator!* Each of these interpretations is based in a particular intellectual microcontext. Sometimes a dog is just a dog, with all the “conventional” meanings and attributes thereof. A case in point: a dog appears in Jerusalem: Israel Museum, MS 180/53, The Siddur of the Rebbe of Ruzhin, Germany, c. 1460, fol. 190r. This, at first, seems a manifestly inappropriate place for a canine romping ground, given the initial word of the Ethics of the Fathers, “Moses [received the Torah from Sinai].” The use of a dog as a metonym for Moses seems disrespectful at best and blasphemous at worse. But if this dog is “read” according to the traditions of bestiary and of common wisdom, what better metaphor could we have for the loyal transmission of the divine mandate from generation to generation than the loyal and obedient dog? And what better symbol for Moses himself, called by God “my servant Moses... trusted (or ‘faithful’) throughout My household” (Num 12.7). Likewise, a beautiful hare, composed of micrographic writing, appears in London, BL, MS Add. 14762, Haggadah, Joel b. Simeon, Germany, mid-fifteenth century, fol. 10v. Following my extensive arguments that the hare is a symbol for Jacob and Israel, especially in his conflict with Esau/Edom/Rome/Christendom, it seems especially fortuitous that this example 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. It could be that the significance of the hare here is twofold: it may refer both to Esau’s hunt and to the fertility of the Israelites. But it is just as plausible that it refers only to fertility; or, in an even more likely scenario, it, like many of the micrographic images in this manuscript, may be purely the playful employment of an ingenious shape for the commentary. So, even within the same manuscript, and even on the same page, marginal illustrations

may be exegetically significant, or merely decorative.

10 Cf., for example, Rashi on Exod. 17:5, Nahmanides on Gen. 44:1, *Numbers Rabbah* 10:2, *Midrash Tehillim* 2:2.

11 Narkiss et al. 1982, 95.

12 Many early medieval examples are more neutral, though Jesus and the observers always betray anxiety, for example Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Cod.ser.nova 2700, antiphonary from the Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter, Salzburg c. 1160, fol. 519. Schreckenberg 1996, 125, no. 2.

Nicholas of Verdun's masterwork of c. 1180, the gold and enamel ambo known as the Klosterneuberg Altarpiece (Klosterneuberg, Augustinerstift), was already a legend in its own time, and influential in terms of its elision of text and image and its particular polemic theological thrust. The altar contains three depictions of circumcisions: (1) that of Isaac, at which Sarah is depicted and described in the accompanying text as weeping; (2) the circumcision of Samson, combining threatening and violent imagery that anticipates fifteenth-century examples with a text that describes circumcision as a dishonorable wound for an offender; and (3) the circumcision of Jesus, which, in spite of Schreckenberg's insistence that it is depicted in a "more friendly way," nonetheless features the knife front and center, and baby Jesus clinging to his mother, and a text that refers to "our wounds" being taken away "by means of the dear wound of sad Christ." It is notable that in each case the baby turns away from the circumcisers and toward his mother. Schreckenberg 1996, 78–79 (nos. 6 and 8, circumcision of Jesus not shown). See also the depiction of the circumcision of John the Baptist in London, British Library, MS Add. 47682, fol. 18r, Holkham Bible, England, c. 1325–1330. Mellinkoff 1993, pl. III.69.

Later medieval examples depict the event in increasingly nasty ways, ultimately eliding them with imagery that was associated with contemporary and later illustrations of alleged ritual murder. See the examples in Schreckenberg 1996, 144–146, and pl. 12; Mellinkoff 1993, pl. II.23.

13 See Kogman-Appel 2000, particularly 836–842.

14 Chap. 31, Friedlander 1916, 224–225.

15 Kogman-Appel 2006, 43, 192–193.

16 Epstein 1997, 97–103.

17 With the exception of its elongated ears, the donkey in this illumination looks like a horse. It is evident that the artists knew how to depict a donkey because they do so rather more convincingly on folio 12v, top left where the shaggy donkey scratches his nose with his hind leg in a naturalistic manner (plate 37, top left). In this case, the elegant curve of the neck, the smooth rather than

ragged fur, the refined muzzle, the size, the stature, and the tail—all invest it with a grace and dignity that surpasses the average donkey. Although it is labeled a donkey, it is clear that the artist intends to show it as what Rashi calls *hamor ha-meyuhad*—the exceptional donkey—to further the exegetical point and to distinguish it from the mere ass ridden by the protagonists of the Christian *Flight into Egypt*.

The donkey does appear in illuminated and printed haggadot, usually as the mount of the Messiah. See fig. 86, as well as the printed haggadot from Mantua, 1560 (*Shfokh Hamatkah*), Venice 1609 (*Adir Hu*), and Amsterdam 1662 (*Shfokh Hamatkah*), 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.

18 The larger analogy is structured thus: Ishmael is described as a "wild ass of a man" in Gen. 16:12, in association with his wild untamedness and desert dwelling. In Jer. 2:24 and Hos. 8:8–10 Israel is compared to a wild ass because of its lawlessness and perversity. Although rabbinic literature goes far to represent the exemplary piety of the Israelites in Egypt, it does so counterscripturally; just as the new Pharaoh "did not know Joseph" (Exod. 1:8), so too do the Israelites seem unacquainted with the God of their ancestors. Although when the Exodus narrative is abridged and retold in Deut. 26:7, Moses instructs the people to assert, "We cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression." In the original narrative the people only cry out—not to God, whom they do not know—and their cry goes up to God (Exod. 2:23). Exodus describes the process of God's taking his firstborn out of bondage, and this redemption is accomplished according to the law of the firstborn (Exod. 13:11–13). Israel must be redeemed by the blood of the Paschal lamb because "every firstling ass you shall redeem with a sheep." Israel is a spiritual donkey in need of the redemption of the blood of the Passover sacrifice, and circumcision is the prerequisite for eating of that sacrifice.

There is a further response to Christian messianism here. In both illustrations the donkey's genitalia are visible, and it is clearly a *hamor*, a male animal, to distinguish it from the mounts of both Balaam and Jesus. Zech. 9:9 describes the Jewish messiah, of whom Moses is a type, as "humble, riding on an ass, On a donkey foaled by a she-ass." Matthew's gospel, in his eagerness to use Zech. 9:9 as an example of how Jesus fulfilled prophecy, depicts Jesus entering Jerusalem riding

astride two animals, one being male and the other female. Both animals are covered by the garments of Jesus' disciples (Matt. 21:4–5). But Matthew fails to observe that in a manner typical of the synonymous parallelism of biblical poetry, the “two animals” mentioned in Zech. 9:9 are, in fact, a single male beast, referred to in two different ways. The authorship of the Rylands Haggadah and BL Or. 1404 took pains to depict the precursor of the Messiah's donkey as singular and indisputably male.

Iconography of backward-turning beasts is not widespread, but does exist. See, for example, the backward-turning deer, which symbolizes God turning toward the Jewish people even as he absconds himself, or Israel turning back to God even as they sin. See Hubka 2002, particularly 223–224. The Mantua Haggadah (Mantua: Ropinillo, [1560], Yaari, no. 18) depicts Elijah's or the Messiah's donkey in similar fashion to the BL Or. 1404 depiction, in the copy housed in the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York. See Yaari 1960, 23.

- 19 The iconographic sophistication of the BL Or. 1404 is generally on a par with that of the Golden Haggadah, and exceeds that of the Rylands Haggadah. In the depiction of the present scene in both the Rylands Haggadah and the BL Or. 1404, a tree stands prominently in the center of composition. Its practical purpose is to divide the scenes, but it also serves as a reference to the continuation of Moses' line, like the tree in the depiction of the scene in the Golden Haggadah. But in the BL Or. 1404, again the symbol is amplified, the tree bearing red flowers evoking the here-unseen blood of circumcision and recalling Ezek. 16:6, “Live in spite of your blood,” or “in [or ‘by means of’] your blood, you shall live!” understood by the rabbis to refer to circumcision as evidence of covenant and the assurance of continuity (Rashi on 16:7 *Exodus Rabbah* 17:3, *Ruth Rabbah* 6:1; *Pirkei De-Rabi Eliezer*, 28:1).

Conclusions

- 1 See Benjamin 1983, 30, no. 1.

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