



FIGURE 2. Haggadah, Catalonia, Spain, 14th century, London, British Library, Add. Ms. 14761, fol. 30^v (British Library, Public Domain Mark).

MARC MICHAEL EPSTEIN

*Thought Crimes: Implied Ensuing Action in Medieval Manuscripts
Made for Jewish Patrons & Audiences*

FOR WALTER CAHN

IT WAS IN 1986, while in a graduate seminar at Yale on medieval Paris with Walter Cahn, that I wrote my first scholarly article. In tribute to Professor Cahn, I want to revisit from a new perspective some iconography I originally considered in that article. The image I wish to discuss comes from a manuscript made in Catalonia in the late fourteenth century. It shows a hare being served a drink by a dog, and seems at first blush to be a typical example of *mundus inversus* iconography (Fig. 1).

In my original article, I contended that the depiction of a hare—a normally timid animal—in a situation of dominance should be read politically in the context of this particular work of art. For the image is from a manuscript made for Jewish patrons, an illuminated haggadah—a liturgical book containing the text used at the Seder, the home service for the eve of Passover. Since Jews were a minority population—sometimes despised, occasionally persecuted, usually misunderstood—in the European Middle Ages, I argued that this iconography—an example of self-expression on the part of the Jewish minority—does not merely mirror and adopt the *topoi* and symbols found in Christian iconography. Rather, it actively appropriates and adapts them.

The image appears as an upper marginal illustration of a page on which the *bas-de-page* depicts the Israelites slaving in Egypt. The text rubric reads, ‘We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt’ (Fig. 2, *opposite*). The implication here seems to be, ‘We were slaves, but one day the Egyptian dogs will serve us!’

This reading is strongly corroborated by the correlation between the bent-over position of laboring man ascending the ladder towards the taskmaster at the top of the tower, and the reversal of this iconography in the image of the laboring dog bowing down to hand a drink to the seated hare. This is but one example of



FIGURE 1. Haggadah, Catalonia, Spain, 14th century, London, British Library, Add. Ms. 14761, fol. 30^v, detail (British Library, Public Domain Mark).

very many from medieval manuscripts made for Jews in which a different perspective on history—a world seen from the end of time—allowed patrons to envision a future in which the pursued could triumph over their pursuers.

Twenty-seven years later, in working on a new book that will deal, *inter alia*, with margins and marginality in Jewish visual culture over the *longue durée*, including the Middle Ages, I have returned to this illumination, although with new considerations. I find that now I am interested in the ways in which time works in these images. In the various registers of this single page, the viewer is confronted with the past (the Egyptian slavery) the present (contemporary dress) and the future (the eschatological hare and dog). The illumination, thus, simultaneously unfolds in three different though interrelated chronological spheres.

This sort of anachronic simultaneity is somewhat less common than the chronological advancement of the narrative over time by means of repetition that is more typical in medieval manuscripts made for Jews and Christians alike. This occurs when depicting several



FIGURE 3. Mahzor, Worms, c. 1300, Leipzig, University Library, Ms. v. 1102, Vol. 11b, fol. 31^v (courtesy Leipzig University Library).



FIGURE 4. *Maḥzor*, Worms, c. 1300, Leipzig, University Library, Ms. V. 1102, Vol. 11b, fol. 31^v, detail (courtesy Leipzig University Library).

actions taking place not over the broad span of historical, present, and eschatological time, as in the case of the image in the Barcelona Haggadah, but rather within a fairly circumscribed time frame, as in the illustration of the triumph of Mordechai from the Leipzig *Maḥzor*, made in Worms around 1300, for example. Here, Haman's daughter is shown—according to the rabbinic elaborations of the Book of Esther—emptying the chamberpot on the head of the man she thinks is Mordechai, discovering, too late, that it is, in fact, her own father who is being humiliated and Mordechai who is being celebrated. This realization leads to her own humiliation, her despair, and her death when she leaps from the window, committing suicide. According to convention for depicting sequential action, she appears twice in this illumination, once at the window, the second time on the ground, actually at the base of the tree on which the sons of Haman are hanged (Fig. 3).

Katrin Kogman-Appel has discussed the iconography of the hanging of Haman in manuscripts made for Jews as a reaction to or a parody of the tree of Jesse in Christian iconography.¹ I would extend this argument to note that this sequential depiction situ-

ates Haman's daughter, a parody of Jesse himself, as the incestuous root of this tree of criminality, in which the hanged sons of Haman represent a 'death wish' for the descendents of Amalek—the living oppressors of medieval Jews.

The critical function of the daughter of Haman is to pour excrement on the head of Haman and thus to contribute to the inevitable trajectory of his humiliation. She becomes an object lesson: a woman—who is, after all, a source of filth and impurity—is depicted as a conveyer of filth and impurity, and, as a result of the filthiness and impurity of her motives, comes to an ignominious end. By means of the double depiction, the viewer is invited to imagine a sequence of action and consequence, simultaneously tragic narrative and somber warning that emplaces this (literally) fallen woman as a perversion of Jesse at the foot of a tree that bears—instead of the revived, living bodies of the (in historical actuality, dead) ancestors of Christ—the (wishfully) lifeless bodies of the contemporary (in historical actuality, living) enemies of the Jews.

In the Leipzig *Maḥzor*, both the action of Haman's daughter, and its ensuing consequence are depicted within the same frame (Fig. 4). There are other images

1. K. Kogman-Appel, 'The Tree of Death and the Tree of Life: The Hanging of Haman in Medieval Jewish Manuscript Painting,' in *Between the Picture and the Word: Manuscript Studies*

from the *Index of Christian Art.*, ed. C. Hourihane (University Park, Pa., 2005), 187–208.

in medieval Jewish iconography that invite us to contemplate transformative action without depicting—but only implying—the ensuing consequence.

For instance, the North French Miscellany depicts the giant bird, the Bar Yokhni—as a sort of cross between a goose and an ostrich—comic, rather stupid-looking, and none too graceful (Fig. 5).

Its gracelessness corroborates the Talmudic report that the Bar Yokhni once dropped a rotten egg out of its nest. The egg cracked, and its contents were so voluminous that they swamped sixteen cities and uprooted three hundred cedar trees (BT *Bekhorot* 59b). By illustrating the bird along with its egg in this image, the authorship of this manuscript signals its familiarity with the Talmudic account.

Furthermore, by playing with the parameters of the roundel within which the depiction appears,² the authorship further hints at the denouement of the rabbinic tale of the Bar Yokhni, transforming the image from a static one to one that betokens implied, ensuing action: The bird's feet appear to slip as it navigates the rounded inner surface of the frame. Attempting to gain a foothold on this unfortunately smooth surface, it will soon fall backwards, crushing the giant egg or pushing it out of the frame. This image seems to be designed so that the eye and the mind collaborate in a game of 'imagine what happens next.'

The double iconography of Haman's daughter embodies the medieval convention for temporal sequencing in which the consequence of an action is explicitly displayed as ensuing from that action. The iconography of the Bar Yokhni signifies a witty anticipation of an imminent but not yet manifest moment—a moment, in this case, of considerable revulsion.

The illustration in the Barcelona Haggadah represents yet another temporal modality, one in which—as we have noted—past, present, and future converge. What was conventional in one instance, witty in another, has become something political here, specifically because it combines—and thus exceeds—the tempo-

ral zones it represents. The sum of its whole is greater than that of its parts.

In a loose trilogy of fascinating works, Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood have been probing the 'anachronicity of the images.'³ Nagel and Wood argue convincingly for what they call 'a web of paths traveled by works and artists—a landscape obscured by art history's disciplinary compulsion to anchor its data securely in time.' They maintain that although works of art are necessarily 'of a particular time'—the time of their creation—they also exist in a state of temporal instability—pointing away from that moment, backward to a remote ancestral origin, to a prior artifact or image, even—as in the case of acheiropoietic images—to an origin outside of time, in divinity.⁴

While I am certainly compelled by this typology of temporality as it applies to Western art in general, I want to consider what it might mean in the case of art produced by Europe's major medieval minority. Medieval Jews lived in a valley of reality between the twin peaks of memory and expectation—the reality of their subjugation to the nations. The cognitive dissonance between this reality and the historical memories and future hopes of the Jewish people is what breeds in Jewish art—as far back as the ancient frescos in the synagogue of Dura Europas, and probably before—unique religious and political sensibilities. Jewish illumination mirrors Jewish texts in making the connection between past redemptions and the great redemption yet to come.

Obviously, Christians also awaited a great redemption yet to come in the Second Coming, and medieval Christian art abounds in eschatological themes and images—from illuminations of the Apocalypse, to scenes of the Last Judgement.⁵ But visual manifestations of temporality created for Jews differ from those created for Christians. Time seems to make a habit of warping itself forward for Jews in the Middle Ages. Medieval Jewish iconography is replete with fantasies of a redeemed and redemptive future in which the present

2. Much as it does in the case of the image of David and Goliath (North French Miscellany, Northern France, c. 1278–1298. London, British Library, Add. Ms. 11639, fol. 523^v), where Goliath exceeds the boundaries of the roundel in order to emphasize his great height.

3. C. S. Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German*

Renaissance Art (Chicago, Ill., 2008); A. Nagel and C. S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York, 2010); A. Nagel, *Medieval Modern: Art out of Time* (New York, 2012).

4. Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (as in note 3), 13.

5. See R.K. Emmerson and B. McGinn, eds., *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1992).



FIGURE 5. Miscellany, Northern France, c. 1278–1298, London, British Library, Add. Ms. 11639, fol. 517^r (British Library, Public Domain Mark).

reality is overturned in a way that, obviously, advantages the Jews and discomfits their oppressors.⁶ Such redemptive fantasies often appear in conjunction and contrast with depictions of abjection in the biblical past or the unredeemed present in a mode that might be termed ‘eschatological projection.’ Recall that in the case of the Barcelona Haggadah, this projection is accomplished within the bounds of a single page. And while it is politically subversive, it is only semi-explicit in the sense that the marginal imagery that comments on the main action of the page could be dismissed as a *drollerie* or a phantasmagoric example of *mondus inversus* iconography.

So, to begin a list of medieval Jewish visual typologies of temporality: the illumination of the hare served a drink by a dog in the Barcelona Haggadah is an eschatological projection that occurs within different registers on the same page. It is politically subversive, but only semi-explicit. But there are other typologies of temporality that develop not on the same page, but in which—à la Nagel and Wood—images respond to each other over the course of the historical unfolding of image-making itself.

Witness the scene of the Israelites leaving Egypt in the mid-fourteenth-century Brother Haggadah (Fig. 6). In the center of the upper register, on one of the rooftops or ramparts of the complex of buildings representing Egypt, a lone trumpeter sounds the alarm, alerting Egypt that the Israelites are fleeing.

Compare this with the analogous illustration from the Rylands Haggadah, a work created under the influence of the Brother Haggadah only a few years after the completion of that manuscript (Fig. 7). It contains all of the same scenes as the Brother Haggadah, but it is configured in interestingly different ways that respond to the iconography of the Brother Haggadah scene for scene and detail for detail.⁷

In the depiction of the Exodus in the Rylands Hag-

gadah, four figures appear on the ramparts of ‘Egypt,’ pointing towards the departing Israelites. One of these figures, though still pointing left, turns his head towards the right, and looks upward and back, calling our attention to a fifth figure, at the far right, who looks up in expectant alertness without pointing at all. When I first encountered these illuminations decades ago, it occurred to me that the Egyptians who watch and point from the ramparts of the city in the Rylands Haggadah look—for all the world—as if they have been summoned by the trumpeter in the earlier Brother Haggadah (Fig. 8).

At the time, I could not say why this occurred to me, except to note that perhaps it was the fact that while the three of the four other figures on the parapet in the Rylands illumination face left, that is to say, in the direction of the action; our eye is led by the single figure who does not face left, to the figure at the extreme right—distinguished from all the other figures in the illumination, and indeed, from all the other figures in the entire manuscript, by his striking baldness—who looks up and towards the right (the direction of the ‘past’ given that things move from right to left in medieval manuscripts written in Hebrew), apparently at nothing. But there was no theoretical work to support such a reading of an action unfolding, as it were, over a series of distinct (even if admittedly related) works of art, and so I let the conjecture of a connection between the images lie fallow, knowing it would sound highly fanciful.

Returning to the images in the light of the work of Nagel and Wood, looking at them also from the perspective of viewer response theory, and, perhaps, most importantly, from the vantage point of my discovery of a meticulous point for point response in the iconography of the Rylands Haggadah to that of the Brother Haggadah, I find that my instinctive reading is supported by a number of facts.

6. See M. M. Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park, Pa., 1997).

7. Note, for instance, the youthful and very heavily armed Israelites in this illustration, in distinct and intentional contrast with the more elderly and primarily unarmed Israelites in the Brother Haggadah (Brother Haggadah [Catalonia, Spain, 1330–1340] London, British Library, Ms. Or. 1404, fol. 6^v, detail). Here there are only four armed figures, and neither of the two

sword-sheathes shown actually contain swords. The difference between the manuscripts amounts to a distinct quietism in the iconography of the Brother Haggadah and a vengeful activism in the Rylands Haggadah’s responses to that iconography, which betokens differing political concerns on the part of the authorship of each manuscript. See M. M. Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah: Art, Narrative & Religious Imagination* (New Haven, Conn., 2011), 223–245.



FIGURE 6. Haggadah, Catalonia, Spain, 14th century ('Brother'), London, British Library, Ms. Or. 1404, fol. 6^v, detail (British Library, Public Domain Mark).



FIGURE 7. Haggadah, Catalonia, Spain, 14th century ('Rylands'), Manchester, John Rylands Library, Hebrew Ms. 6, fol. 18^v, detail.

DIRECTION OF NARRATIVE (HEBREW MSS.)

Left Right



DATE OF ILLUMINATION

(RYLANDS) Later Earlier (BROTHER)



Bald figure in later Ms. 'looks back' on the trumpeter in the earlier Ms.:



FIGURE 8. Comparison: Haggadah ('Brother'), Catalonia, Spain, 14th century (London, British Library, Ms. Or. 1404, fol. 6^v, detail). Haggadah ('Rylands'), Catalonia, Spain, 14th century (Manchester, John Rylands Library, Hebrew Ms. 6, fol. 18^v, detail).

The Rylands and Brother haggadot are two manuscripts in a Hebrew linguistic context in which texts and images are read from right to left, with events in the narrative that are earlier in time appearing to the right, and events later in time appearing on the left. If one were to mirror the right-to-left narrative directionality in arranging the two Exodus images in sequence of production history, one would place the image from the older manuscript (the Brother Haggadah) on the right, and the one from the newer manuscript (the Rylands Haggadah) on the left. When one does this, the distinctively bald, rightward-facing figure in the later Rylands Haggadah indisputably seems to be 'looking back' and looking upwards not towards nothing,

but rather, towards the leftward facing trumpeter from the earlier Brother Haggadah (Fig. 8).

These facts preclude a facile dismissal of the possibility of viewer response—or in this case, more accurately, creator response—on the part of the authorship of the later Rylands Haggadah. Viewer response theory emphasizes the importance of the role of the audience of readers as active agents who impart 'real existence' to art and complete its meaning through interpretation. Art is thus considered to be a kinetic construct not only referring backward to its antecedents, but also casting itself forward in time towards *nachleben* in which each viewer not only creates new meaning, but completes original meanings. While one could write

off the idea that the meaning of, say, Leonardo's *Last Supper* is 'completed' via its latter-day reproductions on velvet in the homes of the working-class faithful, viewer response is—as Leo Steinberg points out—more difficult to ignore when the respondent is not merely a copyist, but a thoughtful interpreter.⁸ And viewer response is not only difficult to ignore, but extremely relevant in cases where the respondent is very nearly contemporary with the creator of the work responded to, and is, moreover, known to be directly responding to the earlier work.

The authorship of the Rylands Haggadah was indisputably aware of the iconography of the earlier Brother Haggadah. In fact, the Rylands authorship modeled its iconography on that of the Brother Haggadah at many junctures, responding, in each case, to the approach of the Brother Haggadah. This response is manifested in differences—subtle or explicit—between the iconography of the two works.⁹ In the case of this comparison, we need to account for two things: why five Egyptians appear on ramparts in the Rylands Haggadah, which—in the previous recension in the Brother Haggadah—were empty save for the trumpeter, and why one of these figures—the only bald-headed figure in the entire manuscript—faces right, while three of the others face left, and one visually cues us to look at the bald-headed figure.

While many of the differences between the iconography of the Brother and the Rylands haggadot betoken variances between the political stances of the respective manuscripts, I'm not sure that one could or should read a political message into the relationship between these two particular images as one could in the case of, say, the Rylands Haggadah's treatment of the illustrations of the plagues, which it adopts from the Brother Haggadah but adds in much more *schadenfreude*. Rather than being political, the iconography of the Rylands Haggadah may be a sort of jocular homage to the Brother Haggadah authorship: the authorship of the earlier manuscript depicts a trumpeter sounding the alarm, and the authorship of the later manuscript

responds, depicting the consequences of the alarm—people appearing on the parapets—acknowledging its debt to the authorship of the earlier manuscript.

This is, of course, not made explicit, nor could one prove it. Still, I hope that, understood in the light of the facts and background I've presented, my reading of iconography over a sequence of related manuscripts forms a useful parallel to the iconographic readings of Nagel and Wood. For this is precisely what they mean when they speak about anachronicity. This reading combines anachronicity with what I call ensuing action—action that takes place after the moment frozen in time in a given illumination. In this case, the ensuing action is extended anachronically or crossmonumentally—over the space of two monuments proximate but slightly separated in time in a manner that is not explicit when one views either monument on its own, but which makes sense when viewing the monuments together. Though speculative, this reading reveals the imaginal mechanics of the visual turn—in this case, motion that ensues or unfolds across monuments in time—imaginal mechanics that, although used here in jocular homage, can be harnessed for purposes more explicitly political, as we shall soon see.

So to review: We've thus far considered two typologies of temporality. First, in the iconography of the dog serving a drink to a hare in the Barcelona Haggadah we examined eschatological projection occurring within a single monument. This eschatological projection is politically subversive since it predicts the downfall of the dominant power, but—because of its marginal placement—it is only semi-explicit. Then we explored a potential, though not provable, sequence of events over two closely related and roughly contemporaneous manuscripts—the Brother and Rylands haggadot—in which the latter seems wittily to acknowledge the former, without recourse to discernable political meaning.

But the most potentially politically subversive typology of temporality goes beyond eschatological projection because it devolves upon a contemporary

8. Leo Steinberg, *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper* (New York; Cambridge, 2001). This is an anachronic treatment in parallel with those of Nagel and Wood: while most interpreters have understood Leonardo as wishing to freeze a single moment in time, Steinberg asserts convincingly that the scene portrays 'suc-

cessiveness and duration.' For thoughtful (and controversial) interpretation, one can do no better than *Yo Mama's Last Supper*, a photographic work by Renée Cox, first exhibited 2001.

9. Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah* (as in note 7), 223–45.



FIGURE 9. *Haggadah shel Pessah*, Prague: Gershom Cohen, 1526.

critique—primarily in the medieval ‘here and now.’ A particular situation, motion, or action is depicted that represents the abjection of Jews in the present age. This is followed by the proposal or presentation of a solution to this abjection *via* a certain deftness and virtuosity of visual imagination.

I beg the indulgence of the reader in taking my example from the realm of early printed books rather than from manuscripts, as the phenomenon is manifest most clearly in the relationship between the following illustrations. A depiction of a hare-hunt appears on the first page of one of the earliest printed haggadot, the Prague Haggadah of 1526 (Fig. 9)—as it did in many previous manuscript versions of the haggadah. This occurs for a particular reason involving Jewish liturgy and Judeo-German puns. The iconography is simple: a hunter drives a group of hares into a net. But given the fact that the hare became an unlikely, though ubiquitous symbol for Jews, it should surprise no one that the next illustrated haggadah printed, the Augsburg Haggadah of 1534, depicts the hares in the process of escaping the net (Fig. 10).¹⁰

These two illustrations, in the identical position in two different books separated by several years in time, seem intended to be read together, just as—I believe—are the two illustrations in the same position in the Rylands and the Brother haggadot. In the case of the Rylands and the Brother haggadot, the motivation is jocular homage. In the printed haggadot, the impetus is explicitly political and contemporary. This juxtaposi-

tion presents a hopeful message, and a statement of defiance, very much in the spirit of the Haggadah’s own famous articulation of theodicy and history: ‘More than one nation has attempted to destroy us, but God has saved us from their hand.’

Now, a hunt is an enterprise of indeterminate outcome: it isn’t over until it’s over. And it can end in one of two ways: it can be successful or it can be unsuccessful. But it is also highly subjective: the measure of its success is gauged by the perspective of the particular protagonists. Hunters and the prey, obviously, hope for different outcomes, and what is a successful hunt for the hunters is unsuccessful for the prey and *vice versa*.

Read separately and from the perspective of the hunter, the Prague and Augsburg images simply represent a successful and an unsuccessful hunt. But read together and from the perspective of the quarry, they represent something very different indeed. They represent a third typology of temporality: they are semi-explicit in that one needs to know that one should read them together, and they extend the statement they are making over two consecutive printings of the haggadah—two separate monuments. Yet read together, they form a very strong and explicit statement of protest and represent a dream of subversion and escape from their contemporary circumstances. This is not a reference to some national memory of Egyptian slavery or to some hope for messianic redemption. It is a wish of which the explicit articulation—‘You gentiles are the hunters, we Jews are your quarry, but you are not

10. Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion* (as in note 6), 38.



FIGURE 10. *Haggadah shel Pessah*, Augsburg: Hayyim b. David Shaḥor, 1534.

clever enough to prevent us escaping you’—might have been risky for Jews during the period of its creation.

In considering ideas of which the explicit articulation might have been risky for Jews, I come, finally, to what I find are the most interesting of visual expressions of temporality in medieval manuscripts made for Jews. These are images that imply the ensuing action without explicitly depicting it.

A case in point is an illumination in the Hebrew Bible painted by Joseph the Frenchman in Cervera, Spain, 1299–1300, and now housed in the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon. The image I wish to discuss stretches across the upper margin of bifolium 444^v–445. This opening is part of the appendix to the Bible that is comprised by a grammatical work, *Sefer HaNikkud*, by David Kimchi, but the illuminations are—as far as I can determine—unrelated to the text (Fig. 11).¹¹

In an article celebrating the display of this manuscript at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in the fall of 2011, author Robin Cembalest described the image in question as a ‘courtly hunting scene ... a falconer and a crossbow-aiming figure converge on a bird perched on a crenelated tower.’ She asked ‘Do such motifs hold larger symbolism for Sephardic Jews?’

11. Cervera Bible, Spain, 1299–1300, Lisbon, Biblioteca nacional de Portugal, Ms. IL. 72, fols. 444^v–445. The text is often cited as *Sefer Mikhlol*, but that is incorrect. The confusion is probably due to the fact that *Sefer Mikhlol* is the grammatical text that appears in the (similar) Kennicott Bible. I don’t mean to say that the illustrations that appear in the margins of Kimchi’s *Sefer HaNikkud* are actually unrelated to the text—the fact that

and cited Barbara Boehm, curator of Medieval Art and the Cloisters at the Metropolitan Museum as asserting that ‘sometimes a crossbow is just a crossbow.’¹²

I am, in fact, in agreement with Dr. Boehm that sometimes a crossbow is just a crossbow. Just not in this case. The iconography deserves a closer look. Again, as in most Hebrew manuscripts, the action moves from right to left. On the right-hand page, we witness a commotion. An armed man is drawing a sword and running towards what we can only presume is the scene of some great battle, or of the hunt of some dangerous beast requiring the *coup de grâce* of the sword. He is urged on by another man who points him in the direction of the left-hand side of the bifolium. There, expecting to see some scene of carnage or of a dangerous beast cornered and needing to be subdued and dispatched by the sword, we are surprised to see nothing but two hunters stalking a little black bird that seems to have come momentarily to rest on a parapet, just having folded its wings.

This tiny creature is about to be shot at from the left with an almost grotesquely large crossbow. This is a direct attack with an overly powerful weapon for such a little bird. Crossbow bolts, after all, are designed to pierce heavy armor, not to shoot ravens. And this is

I cannot discern any relationship will (hopefully) not preclude other more discerning viewers from apprehending them.

12. R. Cembalest, ‘Everything Is Illuminated: Three rare medieval Hebrew Bibles on display at the Metropolitan Museum in New York reveal the affinity between Sephardic and Islamic texts,’ *Tablet*, 23 November, 2011, 7:00 A.M., <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/83906/everything-is-illuminated>.



FIGURE 11. Bible, Spain, Cervera 1299–1300, Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Ms. IL.72, fols. 444^v–445 (Biblioteca nacional de Portugal).

a substantial specimen, almost as big as the man who so improbably wields it. One imagines the bolts are quite heavy.

At right, a falconer prepares to fly his hawk. This is an indirect attack upon the bird *via* an intermediary, a method that is both less direct and generally the province of more socially elite hunters. This, too, is a disproportionate and unrealistic attack: one flies hawks to hunt hares or small mammals, or even edible smaller birds. But a raven is a troublemaking scavenger, a ‘garbage’ bird, a gallows bird beloved of nobody (except, perhaps the Warders in the Tower of London). No one eats ravens. One wants to rid oneself of them, not pursue them. As anyone who has trained or hunted with raptors knows, sending a hawk to capture a raven is a ludicrous waste of time and effort. The whole thing seems to be a bit of comedy on the theme of outrageously overdetermined violence, with the expenditure of so much firepower against so small a menace.

What is the upshot of all of this hubbub? The little black bird, as noted, has just come momentarily to rest. But one of its feet is already off the parapet, and it tilts its head, inclining a beady eye in the direction of the crossbow-wielder, while simultaneously turning towards the hawker. The angle of the bird’s head and the

position of the black iris of its eye within the white give it an incredulous, slightly and mockingly ironic and skeptical look. In a second it will be off, eluding the deadly but too-heavy crossbow bolt. The hawk, which—expecting to be launched at a hare—will be momentarily confused, and therefore, although swift, it will not be swift enough to catch the little raven, assuming it would even try to do so.

The urgent summons of the gesturing gentleman will seem foolish and superfluous, as the sword-bearing protagonist, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter, arrives on the scene, sword drawn, earthbound, only to watch the little black bird sail away on the breeze, cawing in triumph at its escape.

In such a circumstance it is difficult to agree that a crossbow is just a crossbow. Indeed, this scene fairly cries out to be read politically: In the medieval liturgical poetry of Jewish Spain, Israel was often configured as the *ahot ketanah ve-sheharhoret*, the *niña morena*—the little black girl—downcast and darkened by her sins, and awaiting redemption.¹³ In this illumination, Israel is figured as the abject raven, and hunted by various means: On the one hand, it is subject to heavy-handed and overblown assaults coming from a weapon in the shape of a cross, perhaps representing the Church.¹⁴

13. Cf. Song of Songs 1:5, and the *piyyut Ahot K’tanah* by R. Avraham Hazzan Girundi, Spain, 13th century.

14. The weapon is indisputably cross-shaped, but obviously

‘cross-bow’ is an English term, in Spanish it is ‘ballesta,’ and in my continuing work on this image I am exploring the use of that term in puns and proverbs.

On the other hand, it is pursued by a method more conventional in the hunting of birds—a courtly prerogative and pleasure. As opposed to the blunt directness of the crossbow assault, hawking is an indirect method of hunting—pursuit by means of intermediaries. If the hunters represent the secular nobility oppressing the Jews, their hawks might signify their agents, perhaps Jewish informers (that is, other, captive, birds).

Finally, the knight drawing his sword represents either the army or the mob—in any event militarized onlookers—ready to sweep down even more heavily at a moment's notice from informers to administer a *coup de grâce*, a fatal blow which is unnecessary and would be almost comedically exaggerated were it not so cruel.

Such a political reading is reinforced by its parallels in another manuscript that is correlated with the Cervera Bible. It has long been acknowledged that the authorship of this second manuscript was both aware of and actively imitated the design conventions of the Cervera Bible, but I hope to demonstrate that that authorship was conceptually attuned to the ideological subtleties of the Cervera Bible as well.

Just as the Brother Haggadah has a younger sibling—the Rylands Haggadah—that pays it homage, the Cervera Bible has a younger sibling that iconographically references it as well. The Kennicott Bible, now in the Bodleian Library (Ms. Kennicott 1), was illuminated in Coruña, Spain, in 1476. It is almost exactly the same size and has just about the same number of leaves as the Cervera Bible. In style, the manuscript, with its many horseshoe arches, is much more nostalgically Mooresque than the predominantly gothic-arched Cervera Bible.

The fact that the manuscripts are 'siblings' is evident in a number of ways. The anthropomorphic and zoomorphic letters of the colophon of the Kennicott Bible, for instance, imitate those in the highly unusual colophon of the Cervera Bible. And like the Cervera Bible, the Kennicott Bible also contains the text of scripture followed by a grammatical text written by David Kimchi—in this case, *Sefer HaMikhlol*. Finally, and most importantly for our purposes, just as in the Cervera Bible, the Kimchi grammar is illustrated with images that can be read as descriptive of—or perhaps

protesting against—aspects of the contemporary situation of Jews in Spain. (Fig. 12).

Here, a variety of stronger animals—dogs, hawks, and foxes—hunt and devour weaker animals—hares and chicks. It seems, then, that along with the many other ways in which scholars have already noted the dependence of the authorship of the Kennicott Bible upon the Cervera Bible as a model, the authorship also looked back to the Cervera Bible as a template for where to physically situate iconography that articulated messages of protest against the depredations of the contemporary regime.

In both manuscripts, that 'commentary space'—so to speak—appears not in the more regularly-consulted scriptural pages that make up the bulk of the manuscript, but in the figurative margins or the conceptual '*bas de page*' of the book as a whole and integral object—in other words, in the grammatical works at the end of each manuscript. In both Bibles, it is obvious—both from what we know about the requisite daily religious practice of studying scriptural text, and from the relative lack of signs of wear to the pages of the grammatical works, as compared with the main text—that these grammars were consulted far less often than the Scriptural bulk of the Bibles.

The images thus appear in each case in the margins of a work that is marginal to the larger work. It appears to have seemed prudent to the authorship of both manuscripts to conceal iconography with a critical message in a less-often perused, secondary, admittedly dry grammatical work, than, say, to critique the king iconographically in the obvious places: in the illustrations of the scriptural passages describing the Egyptian oppression, in the explicit and bold manner of, say, the Barcelona Haggadah.

In spite of their similarities, the Kennicott Bible differs from the Cervera Bible in that while the Kennicott Bible contains many more images of protest, they are devoid of solution or resolution. Not only do they lack the bold explicitness of the Barcelona Haggadah, where the illustrations depict both the oppression of Jews by gentiles and its resolution in the reverse servitude of the gentiles to the Jews, but they even lack the subtly subversive element that is so elegantly hidden in the implied ensuing action in the earlier Cervera Bible. Nothing is implied here; there is only oppression.



FIGURE 12. Bible, Coruña, Spain, 1476, Oxford, British Library, Ms. Kennicott 1, fol. 888^a (© The Bodleian Libraries).

And the outcome is obvious, and devastating. There are only two occasions in the Kennicott Bible on which this protocol is breached, but they are very striking, both in their explicitness, and in their subtle differences from one another.

On folios 442^b and 443^a, we note not only messages of protest, but, finally, dreams of subversion as well. Folio 443^a depicts a castle of mice attacked by an army of ten cats (Fig. 13). The cat leading the attack wears a crown—not a particularly subtle iconography. But interestingly, only he and one other cat are armed with swords and shields. The remaining eight are shown in military ranks but unarmed. By way of contrast, the six mice are armed with twelve spears between them. The weak, thus, appear in a defensive position, but holding the position nicely. The contest thus seems reasonably equal in spite of expectations, so the outcome, while still indeterminate, looks cautiously hopeful.

In the illustration on the opposite page, an army of fourteen hares attack a wolf's castle (Fig. 14). The hares are more numerous than the cats in the illustration on the opposite page—and they are well-armed, with spears as opposed to swords. Interestingly, there are two crowned hares. One sits on a throne at the rear, and the other leads the army. The castle is inhabited by a lone, apparently unarmed wolf.

As opposed to the other illustrations in the Kenni-

cott Bible, which depict the depredations of the world as seen through the eyes of Jews of the Kingdom of Castile in 1476, and perhaps messages of protest about these depredations, these images, by way of contrast, express dreams of subversion in a *mundus inversus* mode, more akin to the eschatological images in the Barcelona haggadah.

The battle of the mice with the cats represents the world as it is: The years 1475–1476 were extremely tumultuous in Spain, given the invasion of the Portuguese under Alfonso V, and the war for the Castilian throne. The Jews, represented by the mice, are a besieged minority, but they remain confident that they can hold their position. According to the typology of implied ensuing action, the explicit action in the image is a siege, the prospective ensuing action—not shown, but implied only—is that the Jews will weather the siege. In this sense, the image has much in common with the 'before and after' typology of the Prague and Augsburg haggadot.

The battle of the hares with the wolf, on the other hand, has more in common with the eschatological projection of the Barcelona Haggadah. The hares—the Jewish people—are led by one crowned leader—the Messiah of the House of Joseph, the warrior Messiah. Behind him, sitting on the throne, is the Messiah the son of David, the ruler and leader of the redeemed



FIGURE 13. Bible, Coruña, Spain, 1476, Oxford, British Library, Ms. Kennicott 1, fol. 443^a (© The Bodleian Libraries).



FIGURE 14. Bible, Coruña, Spain, 1476, Oxford, British Library, Ms. Kennicott 1, fol. 442^b (© The Bodleian Libraries).

Jews. Against such an army, with such leadership, the gentiles have no hope, and the lone wolf against whom they march had better give up sooner rather than later, for it will not go well for him. The explicit action in the image is again a siege, but here—because the siege is undertaken by Jewish warriors—the implied, ensuing action is the ultimate total overthrow of gentile overlordship.

The corroboration of both protestant and actively subversive imagery in the Kennicott Bible attests to the fact that the authorship of that iconography, at least, read the images in the earlier Cervera Bible, on which they based their iconography, as messages of subversion. Again, the authorship of each manuscript places this iconography in the identical position in the manuscript—in the marginal or ‘commentary space’ of the grammatical works. Both bibles, then, project subversive responses to contemporary political circumstances, *via* implied, ensuing action. Each does so within its own context, but also—because of the relationship between the earlier Cervera Bible and the later Kennicott Bible that emulates and re-presents its iconography—across monuments as well.

To summarize again: The Barcelona Haggadah embodies eschatological projection. The Brother and Rylands haggadot demonstrate how ambiguous ensuing action may be sustained over related, roughly contemporaneous, but sequential works. Less ambiguous ensuing action sustained over related, roughly contemporaneous, but sequential works is demonstrated in the Prague and Augsburg haggadot. When read together these images have the cumulative effect of subversive political critique. Finally, implied ensuing action representing subversive dreams is evident both within the Cervera Bible itself (the raven hunt) and in the relationship between the Cervera and Kennicott Bibles.

I’d like to conclude with one more image that seems to me to concisely exemplify the employment of implied ensuing action to present subversive dreams. This

seems at first glance to be a ‘merely decorative image.’ It is a depiction, from the so-called Leipzig Mahzor, made in the very early fourteenth century, of four stylized flowers surrounding the word ‘*Shoshan*,’ which means ‘rose’ or ‘lily.’ It is the initial word for the liturgical poem ‘*Shoshan Emek Ayumah, Shabbat Shabbaton Le-Kaymah*’ (‘The rose [or lily] of the valley trembled [in her zeal] to observe the Sabbath of Sabbaths [Yom Kippur], the Day of Atonement’) recited at the additional service or *Mussaf*, on the morning of Yom Kippur (Fig. 15). These stylized flowers, so flat and symmetrical, with a single uniformly-sized point at the center may bring to mind volvelles, the free-rotating wheels of parchment or paper laid into manuscripts and early printed books to save the reader the trouble of turning the entire volume in order to view a part of a chart.¹⁵ Upon closer scrutiny, it becomes clear why these flat images conveyed the impression of potential motion.

Although the two flower roundels above the initial word are bounded with very handsome diamond-shaped decoration, the two flower roundels below the initial word have—in place of those diamonds—distinctly ‘directional’ arrows, making them seem as if they should revolve. Moreover, these lower flowers are supplemented with a further iconography: A dog stands—rather precariously—on the right-hand roundel, while a hare, looking off to the left, balances equally unstably on the left-hand roundel. In the center, with its tail hanging down into the most narrow space between the roundels, a dragon opens its mouth, and roars with its head and body positioned upward, as if it is trying to ascend towards the word *Shoshan*. What is depicted here is most definitely a moment frozen in time. As in the case of the Bar Yokhni bird about to tip over and crush its egg, the illuminators are humorously toying with the shapes on the page to create a precarious balance that will be upset in the next moment. Yet the stakes are greater in this case.

15. The first known volvelle is applied to a manuscript of Matthew Paris, from 1250. Most early volvelles presented, tabulated, and as time went on, helped to calculate astronomical information, but they are also occasionally used to diagram magical or other practices as well. The element of motion added to the static

framework of the book transforms it into an entirely different kind of medium. It becomes a hybrid of book and machine, a low-tech parchment or paper ‘calculator.’ See J. Helfand, *Reinventing the Wheel* (New York, 2002).



FIGURE 15. Mahzor, Worms c. 1300, Leipzig, University Library, Ms. v. 1102, Vol. 11b, fol. 129^r (courtesy Leipzig University Library).

For fourteenth-century Jews the iconography of the hare pursued by dogs can represent the pursuit of Israel by her gentile persecutors. Likewise, for that same population, the dragon represents a quasi-divine force of great evil that is perpetually attempting to harm the Jewish people (here troped as the trembling rose or lily of the valley, per *Song of Songs* 2:1, and represented by the word ‘*Shoshan*’) and even to usurp the place of God.¹⁶

Although the hare turns to the left, seeking to jump off its ‘treadmill,’ it appears, for all intents and purposes, to be locked into the seemingly endless cycle of its pursuit by the dog. The dog, too, seems inevitably doomed to continuously carry out its ultimately futile hunt. One can imagine the Jews for whom this image was created sighing under what they perceived as the boundless and immeasurable burdens of Exile, and what they felt was the interminable saga of their pursuit by the nations of the world.

But in spite of this, the illumination sounds a couple of hopeful notes. First, the dog will never actually capture the hare for good and for all. In other words, while suffering is inevitable, to quote Jeremiah, “‘Yet even in those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will not destroy you completely’ (5:18). ‘I am with you and I will save you (30:11).’” For there is a deeper, more theological observation being made by this iconography—a theodicy of exile and the pursuit of Israel by the nations.

As the result of the very same, frustrating, apparently futile process of history—which consists here of the seemingly endless cycle of the pursuit of Israel—when, in other words, those wheels begin to move—the forces of Evil in the universe, as represented by the dragon, will be brought down and crushed. One can imagine the wheels moving, the tail catching, the dragon being pulled under, and never having the opportunity to seize and harry the inviolate Israel, the *Shoshan*—the rose or lily. The message in a nutshell: Israel will suffer, the suffering will seem endless, but as a result of the very process of history set into mo-

tion by that suffering, redemption will come and evil will be—quite literally—crushed.

In a context where iconography speaks to political and theological concerns, implied ensuing action—displaying a present state of an object while helping the viewer project a future state for that object—can transform what at first appears to be a frozen scene into an articulation of potentiality or consequence.

Readings taking into account the implied ensuing action of protagonists and/or objects can thus expand our horizons regarding the potential meanings of such iconography. The view of the object at rest is a snapshot, as it were, of the extant state of theological and political affairs in a given iconographic expression. But as soon as we notice that ensuing action is implied, it becomes clear that the *status quo* of political and theological meaning may also hint at or imply a potentiality or consequence that remains inchoate when one merely looks at the image as it is frozen in time.

But when one considers the image as a snapshot of something more kinetic—of a single moment in a continuum—the ultimate (and often dissident or questionably orthodox) political and theological messages implied but not articulated in the image reveal themselves. The strategy of implied ensuing action has the advantage of allowing the image itself to remain ‘innocent’ to the eyes of a similarly innocent viewer. At the same time, for those whose eyes have been opened to the strategy, the image’s static present is simply a doorway to imagining its potential once it ‘gets moving,’ so to speak. And since the potentialities and consequences of the implied ensuing action are constructed only in the mind of the enlightened viewer, there is no trail of evidence that could lead to the indictment of such a viewer on charges of sedition or heresy. Images employing a strategy of implied ensuing action enable intelligent readers with a thirst for uncovering subversive agendas to commit the perfect crime, a thought-crime only, one for which there is no visual—but only imaginal—evidence.

16. See Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion* (as in note 6), 70–95.