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"IS THAT A HARE IN MY HAROSET?" **ART AND WHIMSY IN HAGGADAH ILLUMINATION**

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The term *YaKNeHaZ*--also pronounced *YaKN-HaZ*-- is an acronym composed of the initial letters of five Hebrew words: *yayin*, *kiddush*, *ner*, *havdalah*, *zeman*. It is a "*seman*," a mnemonic aid to remembering the correct order of the blessings of the *kiddush* and the *havdalah* when Passover coincides with the conclusion of *shabbat*. If we turn to the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Pesahim*, 103a, we learn that Abaye taught *YaKaZNaH*; while Raba maintained it was *YaKNeHaZ*, and the halachah is according to Raba. While *YaKNeHaZ* never found its way into the *seder* service proper-- like its more famous cousin, Rabi Yehudah's *semanin* for the ten plagues: *DeZa"KH ADa"SH BeA"HaV*--it did gain its own particular place of honor in the history of *haggadah* illumination.



YaKNeHaZ sounds similar to the German phrase "jag den Has, hunt the hare." At some time unknown to us, and most likely in a German speaking region, an artist illuminating a *haggadah* decided that the insertion of a hare-hunt scene at this point in the liturgy was a suitably amusing piece of artistic whimsy, a punning pictorial witticism. In this famous example from the *First Cincinnati Haggadah*, produced in southern Germany towards the end of the fifteenth century, we see that the scribe, Meir ben Israel Jaffe of Heidelberg, has written the *seman* as part of his liturgical directions, and then "spelled-out" the *seman* underneath as five words. Immediately under these is the hare-hunt scene. In the *Ashkenazi Haggadah*, produced in the south of Germany around 1460 and illustrated by Joel ben Simeon Feibusch (*Ashkenazi Haggadah*, [p.10]), there is neither liturgical direction nor *seman*; the illustration appears on the bottom of the page which contains the blessing for *ner*, and part of the *havdalah*.



We have no data that reveals exactly when some illuminator first inserted a hare-hunt scene in a *haggadah* adjacent to the *seman yaknehaz* or the *kiddush* which includes the *havdalah*. However, whenever it actually occurred, it was certainly a novel and whimsical piece of art--a good visual pun. The second time the hare-hunt was used, it was not so novel, not so catchy. Why did this punning pictorial witticism become such a recurring feature in *haggadah* illustration? This problem of inquiry will not yield some to some direct, chronological or textual, solution. We simply have no sure candidate for the first appearance of a hare-hunt illustration in a *haggadah*.

Indeed, the attempt to find some solution to this question is potentially clouded by the prevalence of hare-hunting scenes in the broad genre of European manuscript illustration and in the narrower area of Jewish illuminated manuscripts. From the pre-Carolingian era, the hare hunt was a recurring motif in European illuminated manuscripts. In one type

of image, a dog or dogs chase a hare or hares. In another, individuals, armed with various weapons and accompanied by dogs, chase after a hare or hares. In one style--as we saw in the first two examples--the hunter holds a boar spear--a spear with a large head and a cross-piece to prevent a charging boar "running-up" the spear and goring the hunter with its tusks--which certainly seems to be ironic overkill when hunting a rabbit! In this cartouche from a seventeenth century map of the *Isle de France* executed by William Blau in Amsterdam, we see two putti, armed with a boar spear, with greyhound, hunting the hare. It is simply one of a set of "stock images" that the Blaues, and very many other artists and printers, have used to illustrate their various manuscript and printed works.



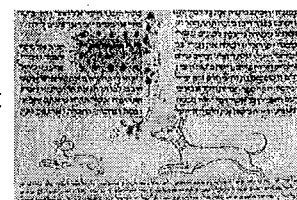
Pictures of hares, without hounds and hunters, can be found in illuminated Hebrew manuscripts. In the introductory remarks to a *Tur Chosen Mishpat* produced in Cremona in 1486, we see a hare nested underneath a rubricated *barukh*.

In this same manuscript, in the illumination surrounding the *rashei tevot* "*RaSHBa*"G," referring to Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol, we find a hare in red, another in gold, and also a goose in gold. Note the image in the upper right, the head of a dog, its mouth open, tongue out, teeth bared. I consider this to be a type of hare-hunt scene. In an image from a 14th century Spanish manuscript of Samson ben Isaac of Chinon's *Sefer Keritut*, we have a dog, perhaps a greyhound, chasing a somewhat pudgy



hare. I can find in neither of these two cases anything in the text that I can construe as relating to, or motivating, the inclusion of a hare-hunt. Like European artists had done for the previous millennium, these artists have simply used a stock image in their illumination of the manuscripts.

I would like now to examine two cases where they may be a textual motivation for the inclusion of an image of a hound chasing a hare. The first comes from a 14th century Chumash. At the bottom of the page, we have the picture of a hound chasing a hare. The page itself begins with the text of Exodus 23:2, which I will quote from the new JPS translation: "I will send forth My terror before you, and I will throw into panic all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn tail before you." The hound-hare image here may well be motivated by the text: God's "terror" is represented by the hound, the "enemies" by the fleeing rabbit.





Our next example moves us back to the genre of *haggadot*, from which all further examples will be drawn. Perhaps the single best known Jewish illuminated manuscript is the *Sarajevo Haggadah*, produced in Spain during the 14th century. We see here a hound chasing a hare, separated by the words “*min ha'aretz*.” If turn back to the preceding page, we find the motivation for this image in the text, where the Egyptians plot the destruction of the Israelites: “...Let us, then, deal shrewdly with them, lest they increase, and in the event of war, join our enemies in fighting against us and gain ascendancy over the country.” Egypt is the dog; Israel the hare. The phrase “gain ascendancy over the country” translates the Hebrew “*ve-`alah min ha-`aretz*,” which can be rendered literally: “And he sprang up from the earth.” The hound takes off after the rabbit as it springs up from cover.



Like the *Ashkenazi Haggadah* which we examined above, the *Washington Haggadah* was also illuminated by Joel ben Simeon. In his commentary on the image contained on folio 7v., Professor Bezalel Narkiss states: “*Go forth and Learn* what Laban the Aramean sought to do to Jacob our Father. This verse triggered Joel’s love for literal puns, and instead of depicting Laban tricking Jacob, he illustrated the beginning of the phrase with a wanderer going forth into the world.” This type of literal pun is seen in a similar image from the *First Cincinnati Haggadah*, where the traveler carries a book in his hand, portraying both “*tse*, go forth” and “*lemad*, learn.”

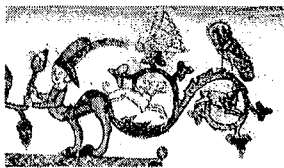


However, I would like to suggest an entirely different motivation for this image in the *Washington Haggadah*. In the printed commentary, Professor Narkiss makes no mention of the hare incorporated into the rubrication surrounding the word “*vayered*” beginning the very next paragraph. And, in point of fact, the “*tse*” text makes no reference whatsoever to Laban tricking Jacob, but rather of his trying to destroy him, and thus all Israel: “Go forth and learn what Laban the Aramean sought to do to Jacob our father. Pharaoh only decreed concerning the males; but Laban sought to destroy all, as it is written “An Armaean destroying my father...” What we have here in the *Washington Haggadah* is a “hare hunt,” with a hunter, no dog, and a hare. There is no “wanderer,” but rather a hunter--Laban--who is out hunting for Jacob, represented here by the rabbit hiding in the rubrication.



The *Barcelona Haggadah* is a most exquisite fifteenth century work produced in the Catalan region of Spain. In her detailed description and analysis of the decoration of this work, Professor Evelyn Cohen states in her description of the page that contains the mnemonic *YaKNeHaZ*: "The hound chasing the hare in the upper-right-hand corner appears to have been included for ornamental reasons, although in Ashkenazi manuscripts a hare hunt served as a visual pun on the mnemonic *yaknahaz*, which echoes the German *jag den has*, "hunt the hare," which would not be relevant in a Sephardi manuscript."

If the meaning of the hare-hunting motif was tied only to the literal pun on the German phrase "*jag den Hase*," then the appearance on a hound and a hare on this page might not be relevant in terms of the *YaKNeHaZ*. However, we have seen that the artist in the *Sarajevo Haggadah* used the hound/hare motif to symbolize Israel's persecution by its enemies. The *Sarajevo Haggadah* was produced in Spain at a date certainly no later--and likely earlier--than the *Barcelona Haggadah*. Given that we have an example of a Spanish artist using a hare-hunt image as a commentary on the text, then the same option could have been open to the illustrator of the *Barcelona Haggadah*.



Let us now examine the different types of hound-hunter-hare vignettes that are depicted in this work. On the first page of the *Kaddesh* section of the *haggadah*, we see a hound chasing after a hare.

On the facing page, we have a stag hunt and a "snail hunt," but no hare hunt.



On the next illuminated page, a hound and a hare appear at the bottom of the page.



The next illuminated page contains two contrasting hare hunt images. At the bottom of the page, we see a hunter, with horn, and a staff from which seem to hang hares already caught. We also have a pack of hounds, and a hare. However, on the top of the page, we have quite a different picture. A naked hunter is being offered his clothing by the hound, while a hare picks up the horn; his call diverts the dog that is pursuing the other hare. On the *YaKeNHaz*



On the *YaKeNHaz*

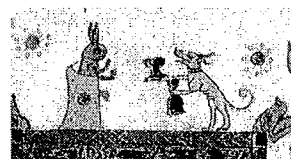


page, one hound has caught sight of a hare, the other just sits there. On the facing page, in the bottom left, we see a rabbit emerging from the foliage; the rabbit seems to be chasing the dog.

In the left panel, a dog with a hunting horn and a shield and dagger seems ready to do battle with a rabbit, armed either with a carrot or some sort of spear head.



Above the *havdalah*, we have a strange image of a snouted creature holding the kiddush cup. This beastie is faced by a hare dressed as a woman. She seems to be hitting a dog on the head with a stick,



or, perhaps, a spoon. But with the end of the *Kaddesh* section, the hare-hunt scenes do not disappear. At the top of the next page, above the scene illustrating *'avadim hayenu*, the rabbit is shedding her clothes, while the dog offers her a cup, with a decanter in his other hand. In the *bas de page* for the conclusion of *'avadim hayenu*, we see hounds chasing a hare, and a hare chasing a



hound. There can be little question that here the artist has let his whimsy run rampant. In addition to scenes of hares being pursued, we have hares pictured as

pursuers of, or using the tools of the hunters. We seem to have almost an "anti-*YaKNeHaZ*" in the kiddush scene where the hare, posing in a human role, seems to be hitting the dog. And then in the very next scene, the dog is offering her a drink and she is shedding her clothes. This implicit message attached to drinking wine is reminiscent of the image of a "snouted" visage in the *Birds Head Haggadah* which is labeled "*bene chorin*," "free."



Through the centuries, as the Jews sat at their *seder* tables, they celebrated both their own survival and God's continuing triumph over their enemies. It is not so surprising that some artist would portray this survival by portraying rabbits triumphing over hunter and hounds, or even mocking the type of freedom--better, license--that drinking to excess might provoke.

The *seder* night is, by long tradition, *lel shimurim* (Exodus 12:42), a "night of watching," which is explained in *Shemot Rabbah*: "It is so called because on that same night He [always] effected deliverance for the righteous, just as He did for the Israelites in Egypt. On that night he rescued Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah from the furnace, and Daniel [from the den]. On that

same night Elijah and the Messiah shall reveal themselves." The very fact that some Jews are celebrating the *seder* is proof that the hunted and oppressed have been saved from their putative destroyers.

The belief in God's personal attention to the protection and the salvation of Israel is at the very core of the *seder*. The function of the hare-hunt imagery is supported in the ideological content of the *he she-`amdah*: "It was not one only who sought to destroy us, but rather in every generation they rise up to destroy us and it is the Holy One who saves us from their grasp."

In the examples above from two 14th century Spanish *haggadot* and a 15th century German *haggadah*, we have argued that artists might have used the imagery of the hare-hunt as a graphic commentary on the text: hunter/hounds as the oppressors and the hare as Israel, the victim, but also sometimes the hare as triumphant over those who seek to destroy her. The hare-hunt seems to me to be a metaphor for the status of Jews in Europe throughout this period, and so became a regular feature in *haggadah* illumination.