Aspirational Images in the Medieval Haggadah

A thesis presented by

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Introduction

In the summer of 2018, I attended an exhibition of illuminated manuscripts at the Morgan Library entitled, *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders*. One whole section of this exhibition featured a series of illustrations whose purpose was to demonstrate how "…marginalized groups in European societies—such as Jews, Muslims, women, the poor, and the disabled—were further alienated by being figured as monstrous."[1] The images of Jews in that section were among those that played a large part in spreading anti-Jewish tropes and stereotypes of Jews.

But how did Jews of that medieval time see and represent *themselves*? That began to be much more interesting to me as I started to research illuminated haggadot, and three in particular: the *Barcelona* and *Golden* haggadot, both of which are from the Sepharad, and the haggadah from the Ashkenaz which appears to be the earliest illuminated haggadah extant, eventually named, reproduced and published under the title, the *'Birds' Head' Haggadah*.

All of them date from approximately the early fourteenth century, which was known as the Gothic era.[2] These painstakingly hand written and illustrated manuscripts were commissioned by "…wealthier Jews, merchants, and money-lenders in Germany and Italy, or courtiers serving the kings and princes of Spain, Majorca and southern France in particular as secular and financial administrators,"[3] for their personal use before

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[1] Lindquist, p. 81
[2] Nishimura, p. 1
[3] Narkiss, p. 11

the advent of printed books, and with the purposes of demonstrating their wealth or status, and of visually enhancing their seder experience.[4]

Jewish scribes were most likely the source of the Hebrew script in these haggadot, while Christian artists may have contributed some or all of the artwork. However, it is certain that any artists were supervised by their Jewish patrons.[5] In the case of the *'Birds' Head' Haggadah*, the artist appears to have been one *Menahem*, who it is believed was the artist for the *Machzor of Leipzig* as well.[6] This manuscript may have been wholly created by a Jewish artisan, although there is still some disagreement among researchers about this.

As I hope to show, the images of Jews which Jews provided or had a hand in creating of themselves in these works are not only very different from those which were displayed in the Morgan Library exhibition, they come from and represent a different purpose—one born of the hope and aspiration to define themselves with dignity and self-determination.

Jews are commanded by the haggadah text to see themselves as if they had personally experienced the deliverance from Egypt, and this has meant that haggadot through history have reflected the personality of the communities in which, or for which, they have been created, offering their readers a window into them, and a snapshot of their time. So, for example, in these medieval haggadot, we see images with medieval architecture, interiors, objects and dress.

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[4] Cohen, A., pp. xiii
[5] Narkiss, p. 67
[6] Kogman-Appel, 2012, p. 18

But in the *Barcelona*, *Golden* and *'Birds' Head'* haggadot, we get to see further: In an age of increasing stress for them, there appear images that reveal to us how the Jews of this time, in these places, viewed and hoped to view themselves, how they wished to be seen by others, and how, with humor and subtlety, they were able to cope with, and at least in their art, upend the status conferred on them as aliens and outsiders.

I am grateful for the supervision for this paper of Dr. Sharon Koren, through whom I have come to a new, deep appreciation and love of Jewish history and particularly the medieval period, as it comes alive in all her classes at HUC-JIR. I have been lucky to have had encouragement and assistance with the variety of Hebrew texts in this research from Hebrew scholar Hanni Bar, and I have benefitted from the expertise of art historian and rabbinical student Sarah Berman. Thanks are also due to the able and cheerful assistance of Tina Weiss and Eli Lieberman, two of the knowledgeable staff members of the HUC-JIR Library. I learned so much from each of these mentors and colleagues, and any errors that may be found in this paper are completely my own.

Finally, to Burt Goldberg who always says, Yes!—why not do it! Thanks for always making these journeys better than they ever would have been without you.

Chapter 1. Aspiration and the Haggadah

To live is to aspire: *to breathe in* and *to yearn* are expressed in English with this one word. In Hebrew it is the same—לשאוף—means to inhale as well as to set one's hopes toward something. For the Jews of the Ashkenaz and the Sepharad, the 11th through the 14th centuries brought to their communities an increasing chasm between aspiration and reality. These years, which brought the First Crusade of 1096 and subsequent attacks on their small communities, came amidst bewilderingly mixed messages from the Church, which ranged from toleration and protection, to welcoming invitations to settle, to decrees of distinctive clothing, to pressure to convert or coerced baptism; placing Jews increasingly on the defensive, and forcing them at times publically to defend their religion including in the Trial of the Talmud, in Paris in 1240, and the Disputation of Barcelona in 1273.

Perhaps it is no accident that the haggadah, the written script for the home ritual of the Passover *seder*, a festive meal commemorating the redemption from slavery of the Israelites, left its original position at the back of the siddur[7] and came into its own during this time in Jewish history, for by its very nature, a haggadah is a document of aspiration. It is a narration of the freedom from slavery in Egypt, even as it acknowledges the current incompleteness of that freedom.

It tells a story of God's miracles, and exudes a confidence in God's deliverance, as in both the Ashkenazi and Sephardi rites, Jews exclaim with sureness at the close of the seder, "Next Year In Jerusalem," expressing the hope not only of a return to a rebuilt

[7] Kogman-Appel, 2014, p. 101

Jerusalem in a Messianic era but of a fulfillment of our wishes for a future better than the one in which we now exist.

In the haggadah the *afikomen*, the last thing eaten at the seder, represents this future redemption as a symbol of the Messiah,[8] or even at times, of facilitating a cosmic union: Rabbi Harold Schulweis writes that in some haggadot there can be found a devotional prayer in Aramaic which announces, "I am ready and prepared to perform the commandment of eating the *afikomen* to unite the Holy One blessed be He and His Divine Presence through the hidden and secret Guardian on behalf of all Israel."[9] And Rabbi Schulweis adds that while our sederim celebrate the Passover of the past, "*The redemption is not over*…We begin the story of our past affliction with an eye set upon the future."

For the Jews of those years who read during their seder, "In every generation they arise against us...," freedom must have felt so distant, making the deliverance promised by the arrival of the Messiah more fervently looked toward than ever. And yet despite the difficulties they faced and feared, Jews continued to live closely, often in "periods of tranquility"[10] alongside their Christian neighbors, or in neighborhoods directly adjacent to them.

According to Ivan Marcus, "Although many writers have emphasized the violence and insecurity that beset the Jews of Ashkenaz, Jews would not have survived there, let alone created what they left us, had that been the main story." He adds, "…members of

[8]Yuval, p. 238
[9] Schulweis, p. 82
[10] Chazan, 2010, p. 163

each culture lived literally face to face with each other on a daily basis. This is the part of the story that is often unappreciated."[11]

The majority of Jewish communities, particularly in the Ashkenaz, were far too tiny—sometimes only comprising ten or fewer persons[12]—to be self-sufficient, and so Christian and Jewish communities interacted with and affected one another continuously via social and commercial interchanges.

In the Sepharad, one or two of the largest communities may have numbered a thousand, although the average was closer to one hundred persons, with the smallest having only a few Jews.[13] Jews worked as traders and money lenders, and although they were regarded as the property of the king, they "…were influential, despite their increasing stigmatization by the Church."[14] In these communities, Jews came to be subject to missionizing arguments and at times compulsive sermons,[15] which often quoted texts from their own holy books,[16] in their own synagogues.[17]

Their close interactions with Christians meant that Jews were knowledgeable about Christianity and many of its teachings. They had an understanding about the differences in the beliefs of Judaism and Christianity,[18] and they were witness to the large changes taking place as the Church was becoming an institution of power.

Pope Urban's speech at Clermont, in November, 1095, calling for an armed pilgrimage to Jerusalem to remove it from Muslim governance became the impetus for

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[11] Marcus, 2002, p. 450
[12] Katz, p. 35
[13] Lipton, 2014, p. 18
[14] Escanilla, et al, p. 7
[15] Escanilla et al, p. 8
[16] Cohen, Jeremy, p. 96
[17] Gittleman, p. 25
[18] Katz, p. 18

the first Crusade, but his directive, with its lack of clarity regarding the Jews,[19] who were never meant to be a target, led to unforeseen tragedies in some Jewish communities of the Ashkenaz. At the same time, the Crusades contributed to the greater centrality of religion and the Church, helping it to consolidate its increasing power in the twelfth century.[20]

As the Church grew in influence and financial strength, greater artistic expression was encouraged for the necessary adornment of its newly built edifices. This expansion, which began in the twelfth century, was a renaissance—a time of particular creativity.[21] It saw the revival of decorative arts that had been dormant for some time, including enameling and bronze-casting, and it brought changes to the conceptions of space and figure in sculpture and painting.[22]

The renewal and growth of religious life and institutions saw commissions of new art, including richly illuminated manuscripts.[23] Jews were aware of these[24] and came to commission the creation of their own illuminated works which for them took the form of prayer books and haggadot.

In *Barcelona Haggadot: The Jewish Splendor of Catalan Gothic*, a guide to a 2015 exhibition on Catalan Medieval haggadot, we learn that, "In this climate of artistic renewal, it is not unusual to find stylistic and iconographic exchanges between Christian and Jewish works and there were some illuminators who worked on both."[25]

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[19] Chazan, 2016, p. 111
[20] Chazan, 2010, p. 60
[21] Chazan, 2010, p. 59
[22] Schapiro, p.16
[23] Lipton 2014, p. 58
[24] Kogman-Appel 2014, p. 106
[25] Escanilla, p. 16

At times, Jewish and Christian artisans worked on haggadot[26] adapting together new Italian innovations in art which were developing at that time.[27] These innovations included a greater interest in the outline and volume of figures, placing figures in more realistic three-dimensional spaces, the creation of miniatures, as can be seen in the *Golden Haggadah*, and an enhanced interest in decorating the margins of pages, as can be seen in both the *Barcelona* and *'Bird's' Head Haggadot.*

In both Christian and Jewish manuscripts the dominant style of this time featured frameless folios, or leaves, which, in place of drawn frames around a page, had ornate marginal illustrations. These were quite varied and served to engage and entertain, often through humor.[28]

Where the frame in an illustration created a "boundary, definition, coherence in the space of a picture, and order,"[29] the marginal illustrations on a frameless leaf at times interwove animate and metamorphosing[30] figures, such as fantastical dragons, birds, beasts, vegetation, serpents, knights, medallions and gargoyles. Without the frame, the images lacked a limit and penetrated, according to Kogman-Appel, "into the viewer's field of vision."[31] This marginal art, then, added an extra dimension and richness to each folio, that according to Michael Camille, could "…gloss, parody, modernize…the text's authority while never totally undermining it."[32]

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[26] Escanilla, p. 4
[27] Escanilla, p. 16
[28] Nishimura, p. 3
[29] Kogman-Appel 2014, p. 109
[30] Sandler, p. 13
[31] Kogman-Appel 2014, p. 109
[32] Camille, p. 10

For the Jews, their artistic use of the margins in these ways, as well as their artwork when they did utilize framed miniatures, enabled them to show the world as they would have preferred it, in which the gulf between their aspirations and their reality could be bridged—a messianic time—if only in those images they were able to dream up and illuminate.

Chapter 2. The Hare

In two haggadot from the 16th Century there appear images of hares being hunted by dogs:

Figure 1. Haggadah illustrated by Meir Yafeh, Germany, Ulm, 15th Century, Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Library, fol. 4r

Figure 2. Hare-hunt. Haggadah, Prague, 1526 (YaKiNeHaZ) From M.M. Epstein, pg. 37, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature*

While these images are typical of what hunts looked like, they have raised many questions regarding the presence in haggadot of non-kosher hares chased by dogs. In **Figure 1**., above, the Hebrew words, יין קדוש נר הבדלה and זמן can be seen. These represent the order of blessings (with זמן standing for the Shehecheyanu) and indicate where havdalah should be when the Passover seder occurs on a Saturday night, as it will do in 2019 and 2021.

Using the first letter of each word, a mnemonic can be seen just below **Figure 2.**, which reads YaKiNeHaZ. The Yiddish word for hunt, is יאגן and the Yiddish word for hare, is האז. YaKiNeHaZ sounded so much like "Jog den Has" in German or "yog dem hoz" in Yiddish—*hunt the hare*—that a number of researchers, including Marc Michael Epstein have suggested that this image is a clever visual pun which assisted in remembering the blessing order.

At the same time, we also see references to the hare hunt in haggadot that are not from the Ashkenaz, but the Sepharad, where Yiddish was not common. In the *Barcelona Haggadah* dated between 1325-1350, and therefore earlier than the haggadot above, there is a similar looking hare hunt at the lower margin of the manuscript folio which can be viewed in **Figure 3.**, below:

Figure 3. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.20v) British Library MS14761

Looking more closely at this marginal illustration sitting below the text it is enclosing, we see the same elements from the previous hunt illustrations: the hunter with his horn, the dogs, a hare:

Figure 4. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.20v) British Library MS14761

This hare, however, appears to have the time to look over its shoulder and glance back at its pursuers. Is something different occurring here? There seems also, to be an ape on the far right, framed by a vine, and some type of bug-eyed-looking dog, also within a vine, below one of the chasing dogs, and above the ape, a hunter-dog with a spear. When we take a closer look at the images at the *top* of this same folio, there is more of the unexpected:

Figure 5. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah) 1325-1350 (f.20v) British Library MS14761

There are two vignettes, overlooked on the far left by a hare who seems to be a calm witness to them. This hare, enclosed by a vine, is connected above the haggadah text to the main image of a family sitting at their seder. In both vignettes, the dogs are posed on the left—the "sinister" side. In one, we see a white hare at center and now *he* has the hunting horn. The hare faces a dog who is seeming to be held within the curl of a vine coming out of the mouth of what might be the head of a lion or of a gargoyle.

Is the hare announcing a change in the rules of the hunt? We have here an example of what is called, in Latin, *mundus inversus*, a 'world upside down,' reversing the natural order of things in which, normally, dogs chase hares, hares flee in fear, and dogs are not held in check.

A tendril of the vine from the lion's mouth points to the right, where a seemingly nude, possibly shivering, possibly female figure is possibly being handed a cloak by another dog. These are strange images and they feel totally different from YaKiNeHaZ!

In subsequent folios of the *Barcelona Haggadah*, the hare and dog are pictured together in chases around the margins of the text, creating a "Tom and Jerry" –like motif. Similar to the cat (Tom) and dog (Jerry) of cartoon film fame who pursue each other eternally but never quite catch each other, the dog never seems to get to the elusive hare who at times almost appears to be taunting the luckless dog.

Figure 6. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f. 24v) British Library MS14761

Figure 7. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.17v) British Library MS14761

Figure 8. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.24r) British Library MS14761

In her book, *Images in the Margins,* Margot Nishimura explains the meaning of the hare or rabbit hunt as they appeared in Christian manuscripts: "In line with medieval beliefs, the hound could also be viewed as man's protector, chasing away evil, for which the rabbit was a common and favored metaphor."[33]

As might be expected, there are differences in the explanations regarding the meaning of a dog or hound and hare chase in relation to Jews and in a Jewish manuscript. Marc Michael Epstein writes extensively about the hare as symbolizing Jacob and the people Israel in his *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature.* As he makes clear the ease with which Jews would see themselves represented by the hare, he notes that with what the Jews in the Ashkenaz and Sepharad were enduring, if there were

[33] Nishimura, p. 39

any character in the hunt with which they would readily identify, "…it would almost certainly have been with the quarry."[34]

Epstein also explains the very negative connotations medieval Christians held and expressed regarding hares, setting them among other societal outsiders who were anathema to the Church, and by extension, to those they also considered alien and evil, Jews. But Epstein says that Jews re-appropriated the symbol—turning the tables as it were, by changing this negative image to a positive one:

> Once branded with this calumny, Jews set about very matter-of-factly to redeem it and transform it from an emblem of infamy to a superlative metaphor for Jewish self-definition. In the hare one finds a specific set of traits that go beyond a general docility and innocence, and that strongly identify with the positive (or at least the pragmatic) image medieval Jews had of themselves: Hares, though relatively timid, are long of ear and fleet of foot. They are sensitive to the portents of danger, swift in escaping when they must. Hares are able to leap long distances, cross borders and frontiers. In short, they are adept at surviving. The hare is also a universally fabled trickster, often depicted as despoiling its would-be despoilers. These are all traits that would tend to be identified negatively in the majority culture, yet positively in minority society.[35]

This view of the hare as a sly trickster is particularly interesting as the hare has been related to Jacob, who dealt with his father, Joseph, and his brother Esau, in a similar manner. Esau's descendants, Edom and Christian Rome, eventually came to be viewed as enemies of the Jewish people.

Through Epstein's passage, we can also understand that the Jews who designed, drew, and/or supervised these illustrations used them to push against the constraints imposed on them by the increasingly hostile Christian society in which they lived. In refusing to accept a view of themselves which came from without, they could control their own image in these folios, and through them, assert their self-respect.

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[34] Epstein, 1997, p. 20
[35] Epstein, 1997, p. 27

The hare, then, was actually to be admired; the dog, however, was a different story. While in many instances in art, including in some manuscripts of haggadot, dogs are seen and portrayed as symbols of fidelity, the image of the dog in the *Barcelona Haggadah* is used here to represent Egyptians[36] and other oppressors of Jews.

Researcher Sara Offenberg maintains that the hunting scenes in Jewish manuscripts are,

> …understood as allegories of the Jew, usually represented as a hare or a deer, being persecuted by the Christians, shown as a hunter and his dogs. In Christian art, white dogs with black spots often represent the Dominican friars, who are also known as 'Dogs of the Lord' (*domini canes*).[37]

Dominicans of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were notable for their aggressive stance of "hunting the heretics and the Jews,"[38] with the aim of "purging Europe of its Jewish presence,"[39] either through conversion or expulsion.

In **Figure 9.**, below on the next page, as we look again at the figure facing the dog who is holding a cloak, many questions arise, including, is this figure a man, a woman, or could it be a child?

In his *Dreams of Subversion*, Epstein only writes about this image: "…a dog bringing a shivering and naked man a cloak."[40]

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[36] Epstein, 2011, p. 251
[37] Offenberg, 2016, p. 6
[38] Kogman-Appel, 2012, p. 111
[39] Cohen, Jeremy, p. 96
[40] Epstein, 1997, p. 29

Figure 9. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.20v) British Library MS14761

However, if we look at the family tableau at the center of the same folio (see **Figure 10.** below), the shivering figure above (in **Figure 9.**) seems to be wearing a cap just like the head-covering the figures who appear to be the mother and one of the children are wearing, and the cloak the dog is holding looks similar in color and style to the mother's cloak as well:

Figure 10. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.20v) British Library MS14761

The shivering figure may not be a man, but even if it is, the larger question is, what is happening in this drawing on the top margin of this haggadah, and what might it mean?

In illuminated Christian manuscripts the first letter of the first word of text is ornately gilded. But Hebrew lacks capital letters, so in a Hebrew manuscript, we find the entire first word of a text illuminated, as it is here—ויקח—"And he took."

We see the figure on the left in the central drawing, who looks to be the father of this family, holding a complete matzoh, on which is written: מצה. The text concerns יחץ, in which the center of the three matzot that have been set on the table, is taken and broken into two pieces, the larger of which is designated the afikomen, seen by some Jews as symbolizing the messiah. The seder cannot conclude without this, the final thing eaten.

This piece of matzoh is supposed to be hidden at the start of the seder, and the mother in **Figure 10.** appears to be doing just that—hiding this important piece. We the viewer, are meant to observe this. Is there any connection between the taking of the matzoh or the act of hiding the matzoh, and the naked and possibly suffering figure?

Why would the figure be shivering? *Is* the figure shivering? Perhaps if the figure had had its cloak *taken* by a taunting dog, and this dog does look to be smiling, the figure might not actually be shivering, but might instead be holding itself in modesty, and trying to hide itself. Then the dog, as perhaps representing a zealous Dominican friar, would be holding out or possibly even withholding the cloak with some triumph, secure in the

widely held belief of that time, that Jews who ignored the preaching friars entered the "jaws of hell."[41]

Other naked figures appear in haggadot; there are four naked figures in another folio in the *Barcelona Haggadah*, but those look like cherubs, who are usually depicted without clothing, and as they blow on trumpets at the corners of that leaf, they aren't trying to conceal their nakedness.

It has been suggested that at times, a lack of clothing can represent "…a lack of status or power,"[42] which was certainly something Jews felt in relation to the larger society around them. It is here, then, only possible to theorize about the meaning of the image in **Figure 9.**, even as it remains one of the more enigmatic in the margins of this manuscript.

Perhaps the Jews who viewed this haggadah at their Passover seder recognized a meaning that we can only guess at now these many centuries later. But subsequent folios in this haggadah show the subtle revenge to be had if indeed this dog is cruelly treating or humiliating this naked person.

[41] Seiferth, p. 131
[42] Lindquist, p. 15

Figure 11. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.30v) British Library MS14761

Figure 11., above, is a folio which appears in a later portion of this haggadah. As the telling of the Passover story begins with the words, "עבדים היינו", *we were slaves,* there is again a little drama playing out on the upper margin. And in **Figure 12.**, below, in a detail from **Figure 11.**, a hare, who appears to be sitting elevated on a golden throne is being served what looks like a drink in a large chalice by a friendly and cheerful-looking dog, who in his left paw is holding a sack with something weighty in it, ready it seems, to offer that as well.

Figure 12. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.30v) British Library MS14761

If we look again at the complete folio in **Figure 11.**, as we see enslaved Jews supervised by their taskmasters physically building Pharaoh's wealth, the subservient dog enables viewers of the haggadah to think, according to Epstein, "We *were* slaves, but one day the Egyptian dogs will serve us!"[43] And once again, the world as it is, becomes a *future-world* where our persecutors recognize our worth and stature, and even reward us. The image is at once humorous and hopeful.

On that one leaf, there is also the interplay of past, present, and future that Schulweis wrote is central to the Passover celebration. These three time dimensions are visually represented, and he notes they can also be seen in the haggadah text, as well:

> This is the bread of affliction that our *ancestors* ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry, let them *come* in and eat; all who are in need come in and celebrate the Passover. Now we are here, *next year* in Israel. Now we are subjects, next year may we be free persons.[44]

[43] Epstein, 1997, p. 29
[44] Schulweis, p. 81

In **Figure 11.** we can view these dimensions simultaneously take place in the illuminated central image, for as Epstein points out:[45] toiling as slaves we Jews represent the past, the present can be seen represented in the contemporary dress of the figures at bottom, and the dog serving the hare (and possibly rewarding him with whatever is in that sack) represents a messianic future.

There is another instance of this hoped for messianic future, another instance of the *mundus inversus*, as a character from the right margin of the folio in **Figure 3.**, as seen below, in **Figure 13.**,

Figure 13. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.20v) British Library MS14761

the figure standing above the ape, the dog with a spear, which Epstein refers to as the "demonic hunter," reappears now at the top of the folio in **Figure 14.**, (seen below) now wearing a robe, cape and hood, reminiscent of those worn by the Dominicans:

[45] Epstein, 2014

Figure 14., Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.26v) British Library MS14761

He faces a very tall standing hare, who is not only subjugating a dog with a stick, but is being served what looks to be a chalice by the large "demonic hunter."[46] Epstein sees him as possibly representing the temporal or secular oppressor of the Jews at this time, while the dog may be representing the sacred or clerical oppressor—here Epstein references the "Dominicans (*domini canes,* hounds of the Lord) who included many Spaniards among their ranks…"[47]

[46] Epstein, 1997, p. 31
[47] Epstein, 1997, p. 133

Figure 15., Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.26v) British Library MS14761

What is also notable here is the correspondence between the text and the marginal illustrations, something that occurs in a number of places in the *Barcelona Haggadah.* In this folio, the text is of the *Havdalah* service, the liturgy for the separation of the Sabbath from the rest of the week and which Epstein interprets to refer to God as also, "…separating 'the sacred from the profane…Israel from the nations.'" Epstein concludes:

> If we read the hare as 'Israel' and the dog and the 'demonic hunter' as 'the nations,' this illumination seems to represent the eschatological capitulation of both the temporal and clerical oppressors of the Jews."[48]

As illustrated in the *Barcelona Haggadah*, that hoped for capitulation, that reward for all the suffering being endured at present, is in a promised future when such things which we can only dream of now, will have actually come to be.

[48] Epstein, 1997, p. 31

Chapter 3. The Knight

The convention of *mundus inversus*, the representation of the "world-upside down," as it found its way into their haggadah illustrations, was one of the ways Jews could get a form of revenge when they knew they could not get any revenge. In one of the earliest illuminated haggadot, the *Golden Haggadah* of ca. 1320-1330, believed to be from the Catalan region of Spain, and so named because of its richly gold-leafed folios, we find other examples of this reversal of the expected world order. In the folio in **Figure 16.**, below, which is based on the book of Exodus, Jews emerge in control and victorious, not only over the Egyptians, but over the crusading Christians as well:

Figure 16. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Golden Haggadah') f. 13r Catalonia, probably Barcelona, c. 1320-1330

The folio in **Figure 16.**, is among the *Golden Haggadah's* 14 leaves which showcase 56 framed biblical illuminated miniatures. This folio, or leaf, is divided as all of them are, into four sections, which read from right to left. The top right of these quadrants, is itself subdivided into three illustrated units: two smaller squares on top with a balancing rectangle beneath. We see in these the final plague against the Egyptians, the killing of the firstborn, and its tragic effects. In the uppermost square on the right, the hand and sword of the winged angel of death emerges from a domed coffered ceiling. The angel's dead victim is here mourned by a woman, most probably his mother, the figure in the pink cloak.

In the next small square, to the left, another woman, in blue and wearing a gold crown, meant most likely to be Pharoah's wife, is mourning her dead son as he is held by a servant or nurse. This is almost pieta-like and reminiscent of the images evoked of Mary holding Jesus at his death. As they are drawn, we are meant to see and perhaps even feel their awe and pain.

And in the rectangle below them, art critic Bezalel Narkiss suggests two possible explanations for what appears to be a corpse being borne away with mourners walking before it:

> The funeral of the firstborn (not recorded in the Bible) or, The Israelites taking Joseph's bier out of Egypt (Exodus 13:19). Six men are carrying a covered coffin. In front are three mourners wearing brown monk's habits.[49]

It might be hard to reconcile the carrying of Joseph's bier with mourners in monk's dress, so it may seem more plausible that this is a funeral of Pharoah's first born son, but the blending of the past and present, this conflation of the biblical and the

[49] Narkiss, p. 46

contemporary is a purposeful choice which we also observed in the *Barcelona Haggadah*.

In the next miniature on the upper right, the crowned figure of Pharoah is waving an almost cordial farewell to the Israelites. Just below Pharoah's right hand, Moses stands in a blue cloak. We can just make out the top of the staff he is carrying, with the rest of it obscured by the green and red cloak of his brother Aaron beside him.

The Israelites are portrayed going down the steps of Pharoah's palace as they begin their exodus, and we can see that some are carrying lumps of dough in one hand, as with their other hands they point upwards. Above this miniature's frame it is inscribed: ״ובני ישראל יוצאים ביד רמה״–"And the children of Israel went out with a high hand." (Exodus 14:8) This sounds and looks very much like people in control.

In **Figure 17.**, below, the bottom two quadrants can be viewed in greater detail:

Figure 17. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Golden Haggadah') f. 13r Catalonia, probably Barcelona, c. 1320-1330

On the right, the Egyptians, depicted as knights astride horses, armed and in armor with a golden crowned king/Pharoah at their head, are mobilized in pursuit. Under the horses hooves we see the mud of the sea bed as the knights follow the Israelites into the split sea, bent on their objective and unaware of their fate.

In the fourth quadrant, on the bottom right, the horses and knights and armor all tumble about in the water, which is drawn as wavy alternating bands of dark and light blue. We can just make out fish swirling above them, as this army drowns together in the Red Sea. Moses and the Israelites stand aside, dry and upright as Moses alone, in his blue cloak and still holding his staff, turns back to witness the Egyptians'/Crusaders' devastation.

Depicting the Egyptians in knights' armor and heraldic symbols, with a crowned Pharoah looking like a Christian king at their head, enables the reader to experience three things: to directly connect the miracle of the Israelites' delivery from Egypt with the hoped for salvation from the more contemporary oppression and terror of the Crusades; to imagine revenge against crusaders and other like persecutors; and to believe in the coming of God's future redemption.

The haggadah, as it provides a natural vehicle for these messianic hopes[50] insists, as well, that we see our own reflection in its pages, in order to better view ourselves as having been personally delivered from Egypt. As the critic Edward Rothstein has observed, "If biblical liberation and my experience coincide, then the Seder is not about just the departure from Egypt, it is about my own trials."[51]

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[50] Harris, p.120
[51] Rothstein, p. C1

As surprising it may be to find hares in haggadot, the appearance of knights may be even more unexpected, and yet, according to Sara Offenberg and Ivan G. Marcus, Jews actually imagined themselves and portrayed themselves as knights,[52] even as knights had been their oppressors during the Crusades.

We read that in France and Germany and continuing into the thirteenth century, Jews were granted permission to bear arms, which resulted in the elevation of their political standing so that, "…Jews ranked with the knights and feudatories."[53] And we learn that Jews knew about that world where knights had daring exploits, rescued young beautiful maidens and adhered to stringent codes of chivalrous deeds and behavior.[54]

As the arts blossomed in the twelfth century, literature had found new expression with the introduction of romance tales and eventually romance novels, and by the end of that century, "Christians were reading 'romances.' These stories portrayed individuals with inner conflicts between knightly duty to one's lady and lord."[55] They were exceedingly popular, and according to Ivan Marcus, in his article, "Why is this Knight Different? A Jewish Self-Representation in Medieval Europe," in medieval Italy, at least, some Jews read and enjoyed a Hebrew version of the Arthurian cycle as reflected in the thirteenth-century manuscript of *King Artus* about Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table."

Marcus also shows that some Jewish writers compared themselves to knights. A French initiative of 1198 which sought to force Jews who had migrated from the County of Champagne to return and therefore become tax-paying citizens again, was rejected by

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[52] Offenberg, 2016, p. 4
[53] Katz, p. 6
[54] Marcus, 2011, p. 140
[55] Marcus, 2011, p. 140

the French rabbis who would not tolerate this restriction. Rabbi Isaac b. Samuel of Dampierre wrote, "For we have seen that in the domain in which we live the law of the Jews is to live wherever they wish, *as do knights.*"[56]

As the hare in the *Barcelona Haggadah* was viewed as representing Jacob and Israel, so, too, we find Jacob linked to the image of the knight. Jacob is referred to as "'אביר יעקב' meaning *mighty one of Jacob,* or *Jacob the Knight*, a phrase found four times in the Bible: in Genesis 49:24, in Isaiah 49:26 and 60:16, and in Psalms132:2, 5…[representing] the Lord as the guardian of Jacob (mighty one of Jacob,)"[57] and Jacob therefore as a knight of God.

It becomes less surprising then, to learn that illustrations of knights began appearing in quite a few Jewish manuscripts, both haggadot and machzorim. Some were illustrated in framed illuminations, as in the *Golden Haggadah*, while many more took the form of marginal images of knights, including in the *Barcelona Haggadah*, as can be seen in the lower margin of **Figure 18.**, below:

[56] Marcus, 2011, p. 142
[57] Offenberg, 2016, p. 6

Figure 18. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah) 1325-1350 (f.31r) British Library MS14761

One of the things that knights were known for, was putting on entertaining displays of jousting. Marcus writes that at least one such occurrence of knights jousting is recorded as having taken place as the entertainment for the bride and groom during a Jewish wedding. And one of the purposes of marginal illustrations was also to entertain, through showing readers contemporary images they could recognize.

Underneath what is yet another instance of hares and dogs chasing but not catching one another, and surrounded by the lion's head and vines we have also seen before, in **Figure 3.**, are two figures who appear to be knights jousting, their lances in contact with one another, as one rides a dark horse, the other a light one. Perhaps with their contrast of colors they are meant to say something about good versus evil, or perhaps they are meant here to show that Jews were quite familiar with knights and their ways.

In **Figure 19.**, below, we can see a detail from this folio which enables us to observe, despite how small these figures are, that these knights are wearing masks which appear to be fully covering their faces:

Figure 19. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.31r) British Library MS14761

Sara Offenberg, writing about other illustrations of knights in Jewish manuscripts, explains that there is much evidence for Jewish knowledge of tournaments in visual culture, something which becomes clearer via **Figure 19.**, as we learn that, "The noble knights of higher status, such as cavalrymen, wore great helms, devices developed during the 1220s, which covered the entire face, except for the eyes."[58] Further, she writes that these helms were worn in tournaments, not in battle, which enables us to be more sure that these two small knights are not meant to be fighting, but jousting, perhaps to provide entertainment. Offenberg also states that knights in tournaments would have been nobles, adding, "This could well be one of the reasons for choosing to portray the knight in the Jewish manuscript as a tournament participant, as doing so hinted at his aristocratic position."[59]

In the Christian view, true aristocrats were not those who were born into nobility, as was the standard societal view, but rather those who believed in Jesus as the Christ, or king. But according to Offenberg, in contrast, Jews prided themselves as being the subjects of *God*—the *true* king, to take on this aristocratic self-definition: "By employing the Christian iconography of aristocratic knights in Jewish manuscripts, Jews inverted these symbols to point at Jews as…[having] true nobility."[60] And so Jacob, as representing Israel, and knighthood, can be seen as an exemplar of this true nobility, and then by extension, Jewish readers of the haggadah are reminded that they are, as well.

[58] Offenberg, 2016, p. 9
[59] Offenberg, 2016, p. 11
[60] Offenberg, 2016, p. 16

Figure 20. Haggadah for Passover (the 'Barcelona Haggadah') 1325-1350 (f.20v) British Library MS14761

Figure 20., above, is another marginal detail from the folio in **Figure 3.** This is a very different knight-like figure, which looks as if it could even be a child. The figure may be naked behind its shield, and it is riding atop a rooster. Like many marginal illustrations of its time, this image may be a parody, perhaps taking the figure of the knight "down a peg," while injecting some humor. The big feather in this figure's cap, which looks a little ridiculous, is reminiscent of the later "Yankee Doodle," which was also in its time, a parody. There is also the prominent use of red in the shield and hat, a color which, according to French historian Michel Pastoureau, was used to indicate "…a perfidious or evil knight, sometimes the devil's envoy or a mysterious being from the Other World."[61]

There are many symbolic meanings for roosters, including, due to their crowing, the marking of time; the ritual of kapparot, in which the rooster is swung around the head

[61] Pastoureau, p. 1

and then slaughtered as an expiation of sin on the day before Yom Kippur; and Jesus' statement to Peter that before the rooster crows twice, "You will deny me three times."

Some of these may have found their way into the artist's and/or patron's choice of a rooster instead of a horse for this shielded figure, which may have been meant on some level to evoke further thinking about knights, not all of it respectful. For while admiring the qualities of knights and chivalry, Jews also remembered the time of the crusades, and the sins committed in the Rhineland by knights in non-chivalric frenzy. They held the belief, according to Marcus, that Jews "…portray Jews as knights of the God of Israel in contrast to the Christian knights and rabble who travel toward a worthless goal."[62]

At the same time that Jews looked at knights and identified with the best qualities of honor knights were supposed to represent, they also prided themselves in the certainty that a Jew's responsibility was to a higher authority than the kings and feudal lords of their Christian neighbors.

[62] Marcus, p. 148

Chapter 4. The Griffin

Of all the medieval haggadah manuscripts which have so far come to light, the *'Bird's Head' Haggadah* is both the oldest[63] and has possibly generated the most controversy. It is believed to have originated in South Germany, possibly in Mainz, around 1300.[64] After existing unknown in private hands for centuries, the haggadah was eventually acquired in 1946 by the Bezalel National Museum—now known as the Israel Museum in Jerusalem where it remains today.[65]

When a two-volume facsimile edition was published by the museum in 1965, its emergence marked the beginning of wildly divergent opinions regarding the iconography of its figures. That controversy has more recently been quieted, although some disagreement lingers. Readers discovered that the figures in the *'Bird's Head' Haggadah* looked different from any haggadah illustrations they had seen before. These possessed human-like bodies with bird-like heads, (see **Figure 21.**, below) and over the next decades, scholars reacted. And revealed many misconceptions regarding Jewish

Figure 21. *Birds' Head Haggadah*, ca. 1300, The Israel Museum, MS 180/57 detail of f. 47r

[63] Kogman-Appel, 2014, p. 112
[64] Epstein, 2011, p. 18
[65] Horowitz, p. 246

life and art in the Gothic era.

The Israeli art historian Bezalel Narkiss, in his forward to Ruth Mellinkoff's book, *Antisemitic Hate Signs in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts from Medieval Germany*, described the 'Birds' Head' illustrations as an "enigma," and as "distorted human figures," concurring with Mellinkoff's appraisal in her text, that these were anti-Semitic representations.[66] Narkiss wrote,

> It is hard to believe that the Jewish patrons who ordered these manuscripts were oblivious of these hateful anti-Jewish elements, and did not change them when they were in their possession. Moreover, although it was one of the worst periods of anti-Jewish riots and pogroms in Germany, Jews continued to have Christian artists illuminate their manuscripts.[67]

For her part, Mellinkoff describes the figures as "bizarre," and "strange hybrids." She mentions the prohibitions on depicting human faces as having at times not been observed, although she sees that prohibition, and "attempts by iconophobic German Jews to cope with the anti-iconic strictures of the Second Commandment,"[68] as possibly the reason for the use of the birds' heads. And Mellinkoff suggests that, "…it is possible that those Christian artists could have inserted hate signs into some of the illuminations...,"[69] including what she identifies as pig's ears[70] on many of the birds' heads, although she adds that she is not saying that *all* manuscripts to which Christian artists contributed were treated in this way.

Mellinkoff then takes up some stereotypes of Jews she believes she sees represented in the haggadah, including the so-called 'Jewish nose,' explaining,

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[66] Mellinkoff, p. 7
[67] Mellinkoff, p. 7
[68] Mellinkoff, p. 11
[69] Mellinkoff, p. 17
[70] Mellinkoff, p. 56

> The beak-like noses on Jews in the *Birds' Head Haggadah*…were intended, I believe, to be stereotyped noses with deprecatory implications. Most of the figures do not have bird's heads; they have human heads with beak noses...[71]

Mellinkoff includes in her list of anti-Jewish imagery, the *Judenhut,* or pointed 'Jews' Hat' which can be seen on the heads of the adult male Jewish figures in the *'Birds' Head' Haggadah*:

> The Jew's hat had extremely negative connotations, especially in the eyes of Christians, since this hat was the required mark, that, at that time, identified its bearer as the descendant of Christ-killers, an unregenerate Jew, a foreigner. Therefore I suggest that the Jew's hats which appear in the Hebrew manuscripts reflect the derogatory significance they had in the life of the society at that time. Because these hats had such denigrating meanings…I have designated the Jew's hat as an antisemitic sign.

Mellinkoff and Narkiss' ideas which were put forward at conferences and in articles were taken seriously by some scholars, questioned and rebutted by others. The art historian Joseph Gutmann was one of a number of scholars of Jewish images and manuscripts, including Ivan Marcus, Katrin Kogman-Appel, David Stern, and Vivian Mann, who, believing an aniconic interpretation of the Second Commandment to be a misconception[72] disagreed with Mellinkoff's theory regarding aniconism as a possible reason for the birds' heads: "…A rigidly and uniformly anti-iconic attitude on the part of the Jews," he wrote, "remains as much a myth as the Procrustean bed on which Jewish art history has so often been made to lie."[73]

Another myth that Gutmann, the historian Salo Baron, and a group of more contemporary scholars have worked to put to rest is that there were few Jewish artists

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[71] Mellinkoff, p. 25
[72] Stern, p. 23
[73] Gutmann, p. 14

through history, because Jews lack an artistic nature. Gutmann quotes the noted art historian, Bernard Berenson as having stated: "The Jews…have displayed little talent for the visual, and almost none for the figurative arts."[74] And Gutmann adds that both Martin Buber and Sigmund Freud had also held this opinion, because, Gutmann believes, many scholars have believed that the combination of adhering to a strict Second Commandment interpretation and the Jews' preference for *the word* has meant that Judaism has denied *the image*.

Most artists of this time existed in and relied on Guilds for their training and livelihood, but the Guilds were only open to members of the Church. That does not mean, however, that there weren't Jews who had talent in drawing and other arts. And it is entirely possible that they may have privately found ways to receive training. So there is no reason to believe that there weren't any number of Jewish artists working.

Mann notes, "…the degree to which Jews created art in the centuries before the Emancipation is not widely recognized. The records of Aragon and Saragossa list Jewish artists who were employed by the Church as painters and silversmiths between 1316 and 1416."[75] We know there were many scribes, and that they, like artists, traveled around from city to city.[76]

This makes it harder to assume that the artists who worked on the *'Birds' Head' Haggadah* were all Christian, or that Jewish patrons were so unschooled that anti-Jewish images could easily be inserted into manuscripts they oversaw. And if Jews were working on Christian works of art, then there had to have been some degree of trust and

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[74] Gutmann, p. xiii
[75] Mann, p. 11
[76] Kogman-Appel, 2012, p. 18

respect among all these artisans, because one breach of that trust would have jeopardized their livelihoods.

Kogman-Appel dates Jewish figural art to the third century in wall paintings and mosaics. These figural forms were then abandoned from the sixth century, as a reaction to a Christian cultic use of icons, returning to it in the 1230s when they no longer felt that Western Christians were adhering to this cultic use. She also differentiates between three-dimensional figures, such as sculpture and *bas reliefs*, and two dimensional images as they existed in manuscripts, and makes clear that the most common interpretation of the Second Commandment at this time understood that three-dimensional figurative images could be used for worship but two-dimensional figures, would not.[77]

More recently, scholars have also come to disagree with Mellinkoff's characterization of the 'Jews' hat.' As Sara Lipton explains in *Dark Mirror,* although Jews in pointed hats began appearing increasingly in artworks beginning in the eleventh century, this first iconography specific to Jews, the *Judenhut* or 'Jewish hat,' was actually not based on any living Jews. Jews saw images of themselves depicted in pointy hats, yet they didn't see that same image in their towns.[78]

In 1267, in Germany, not many years before the *'Birds' Head' Haggadah* was created, when the Synod of Breslau demanded the restoration of the wearing of the so-called 'Jewish' or 'pointed' hat, an edict which had basically been ignored, "People had become reconciled to the fact that on the whole, the Jews dressed no differently than the gentiles."[79]

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[77] Kogman-Appel, 2014, p. 105
[78] Lipton, 2014, p. 21; p. 44
[79] Strauss, p.67

It seemed that the *only* way to distinguish Jews was if they wore distinctive clothing—so much for the 'Jewish nose,' although Lipton shows that exaggerated features including noses did eventually play an increasing role in anti-Jewish iconography, but this was not prevalent at the time of the *'Birds' Head' Haggadah.*

Nina Rowe is among scholars who believe that the rules regarding the imposed wearing of the *Judenhut* were "…bent more toward discipline than debasement,"[80] which contradicts Mellinkoff's assertions. And while Mellinkoff assumes that the 'Jews' hat' was a part of Jews' everyday wear, Lipton states that this was not the case. We learn that only the most pious Jewish men covered their head at all, and it was "…not until well after the end of the Middle Ages that covering the head both inside and outside the synagogue became standard practice for religious Jews."[81]

Lipton's research also shows that the hat did not arise as an anti-Jewish image, although she notes that: "…the pointed 'Jewish hat' does look odd to modern eyes." She continues:

> In spite of its resemblance to the modern dunce cap, the shape of the hat would not have appeared ludicrous to medieval viewers, who were accustomed to seeing headgear of quite extreme sizes and shapes on a range of figures in art, and probably also in life. Indeed, the closest analogue to the *pileum cornutum* was…the papal tiara (to which…it was in fact related).[82]

The pointed hat can actually be seen on images of the Magi from as early as the third century on a sarcophagus in southern France, through which Lipton makes the case that the pointed hat actually signified "…antique and Eastern Wisdom and authority."[83]

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[80] Rowe, p. 29
[81] Lipton, 2014, p. 19
[82] Lipton, 2014, p.23
[83] Lipton, 2014, p. 32

In an extensive treatise on the Jewish hat and its origins, researcher Naomi Lubrich noted that Jews ceased wearing the pointed hat as it kept morphing into other shapes, or they abandoned these hats altogether. However she noted that, "…at least in some communities Jews attempted to reclaim the hat as a source of pride."[84]

If we could put ourselves in the place of those persons attending the first seder at which the *'Birds' Head' Haggadah* was used, what would we see? What would we feel and how would we react during our initial views of it? Would we recoil? Or would we laugh, and along with some curiosity, express delight? Would we be angry at seeing Jews depicted with those beaks, or would we feel charmed and find ourselves entertained? Would we identify with the images and see them as Jews like us, or would we feel that we were seeing mean caricatures in a parody of ourselves? Would we see these figures as monstrous, or attractive? Would we feel defeat or pride?

If we had recoiled, if the original readers of this haggadah had felt revulsion, could this haggadah have survived all these centuries? Would it have been kept for each subsequent seder, preserved and eventually hidden from the Nazis, if those medieval Jews in Germany had not seen something to identify with in it?

Looking at the illustrations, the figures on practically every page are so industrious, so kinetic, so seriously bent to all their tasks, whether it be making matzoh, receiving the Torah, preparing the Passover lamb, gathering manna, or splitting the Red Sea. They are so dynamic that few characters are actually standing up straight, unless they are looking up toward God and the heavens. They look so unselfconscious, so

[84] Lubrich, p. 230

comfortable in themselves as they jauntily wear their pointed hats. They look dignified and yes, proud.

In **Figure 22.**, below, we have a bifolium, a double folio, from the *'Birds' Head' Haggadah* with what is known as a *bas-de-page*[85] scene—literally, a 'bottom of the page' marginal illustration across two folios. Lucy Freeman Sandler notes that the *bas-de-page* is "…linked with the introduction of complex, coherent figural compositions."[86]

Figure 22. *Birds' Head Haggadah*, ca. 1300, The Israel Museum, MS 180/57 ff. 26r and 26v

[85] Brown, p. 8
[86] Sandler, p. 2

As in all of this haggadah's illustrations, only primary colors are utilized but the limited number of colors provides a unifying structure. There is a repetition of the red in two snood-type women's hats, a fork, a tunic, and the outline of the oven bricks, and then the repeated use of yellow for the matzoh, the child's tunic and the bricks, as we see these six figures working energetically and closely together. We are witness to the entire matzoh making process as, moving from right to left, we first see the rolls of dough, the forming and stretching of it, the decorative piercing of it with forks, to keep the dough from rising—held by the male adult figure in green as he demonstrates for the child in yellow—and the baking of it in the domed oven.

The prominent use of red and yellow, two colors Christian thought associated with evil[87] and which was later the basis for yellow badges for Jews, is a way of upending the negative meaning of those colors as we see them on these cheerful figures. The figures' tunics are simple and each one the same but for their color, but the iconography—the showing of this process from start to finish, actually has deep meaning for the patrons and audience of this haggadah.

From the 1140s, stories had begun circulating in Europe that Jews were killing Christian children and collecting their blood for the making of matzoh.[88] At a time that Jews were being accused of a blood libel, this illustration demonstrates that there are no secrets in making matzoh—Watch, the figures seem to be saying, we're showing you the entire process—this is how the matzoh is made! And we see the community working together to do it—including the women and children, as we see illustrated in a detail of **Figure 22.**, below, in **Figure 23.**:

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[87] Lipton, 2014, p. 7
[88]Rowe, p. 38

Figure 23. *Birds' Head Haggadah*, ca. 1300, The Israel Museum, MS 180/57 detail of f. 25v

Meyer Schapiro, in his introduction to the facsimile edition of the *'Birds' Head' Haggadah* which was among the first treatises on the manuscript, wrote:

> However we explain the image of a Jew with a bird's head, it is a fascinating figure that incites wonder and reflection of the affinities of man and bird…The painter of this manuscript was not in the forefront of artists of his generation, but like many craftsmen educated in the Gothic style he possessed a sure hand and taste at the service of tasks of real moment for the community whose beliefs and feelings he shared in conceiving the precious work.[89]

How the community knew it was being viewed and the stress they must have experienced over these accusations, and how they hoped they might be able to set the record straight, is here made explicit in this carefully choreographed illustration of matzoh-making.

Those affinities of man and bird that Schapiro alludes to, are at their beginning about the difference between the bird and man; the freedom the bird has to fly and escape its surroundings if it wishes to, something the earth-bound man lacks. Schapiro believes that the bird in the *'Birds' Head' Haggadah* can be seen as a symbol of the Jewish

[89] Schapiro, 1965, pp.18-19

people, and although he admits that he cannot say decisively what kind of bird it is, he suggests that it is an eagle.

The suggestion of an eagle as it relates to a Passover haggadah is logical, for in Exodus 19:4 God has told Moses to remind the house of Jacob and the children of Israel what God did to the Egyptians, and how, "I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself." Schapiro adds, "The Jews as God's people are his eaglets."[90]

To think of Jews as eaglets safe within God's wings, is a beautiful image, and it is one with which Jews can identify and feel represented through. However, a large question remains: How do we explain those ears we see on some of the figures in the illustrations? Mellinkoff derided them as "pigs' ears," and we can definitely see ears that are not eagle or bird-like in **Figure 24.** and **Figure 25.** below:

Figure 24. *Birds' Head Haggadah*, ca. 1300, The Israel Museum, MS 180/57 detail from f. 23r

Figure 25. *Birds' Head Haggadah*, ca. 1300, The Israel Museum, MS 180/57 detail from f. 12r

[90] Schapiro, 1965, p.18

In their 1982 book, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*, Thérèse & Mendel Metzger, in a section titled "Fabulous Beasts," write about the Christian and Jewish shared usage of images of imaginary beasts, such as the unicorn, the French *fauvel*, and the phoenix, as well as 'traditional' hybrid beasts, including the griffin:

> In Italy, Spain and Germany, Jewish illuminations show griffins of a classical type: hind-quarters like those of a lion; wings, head, strong beak, front feet with powerful claws like those of an eagle, and the pointed ears of a dog.[91]

Though imaginary, the griffin has been seen as a beloved creature, and came to be used in heraldry as a symbol of courage and boldness. It is even more powerful than the eagle, and the very opposite of a negative self-image. In combining the eagle, a symbol of swiftness, divine protection of the Jewish people, and a symbol of their redemption; with the lion, a symbol of strength, triumph, and of Judah, the griffin brings together the Jewish past, with its deliverance from Egypt and Jewish hopes for a future in which they will emerge triumphant. The griffin unites the earth-bound lion, with the eagle which can soar toward heaven.

In the griffin then, we find an astonishing and wonderful possible explanation of the bird-like heads in this haggadah, and yet it was not until 2011, that this connection was made, when Marc Michael Epstein's *The Medieval Haggadah: Art, Narrative & Religious Imagination* was published. In his research, Epstein shows that the griffin head is used to express the commonality of all the Jews depicted in this haggadah, while the *Judenhut* is used to indicate more subtle differences amongst them.

He points out that in the *'Birds' Head' Haggadah* the prominent *Judenhut* took any possible negative connotation and,

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[91] Metzger, p. 27

> …transformed it 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 on the fringes of the community are refused one.[92]

This almost sounds poetic and we can begin to understand what Epstein means, as we look at **Figure 26.**, below:

Figure 26. *Birds' Head Haggadah*, ca. 1300, The Israel Museum, MS 180/57 detail of ff. 24v & 25r

Here, in another *bas-de-page* on a double folio, on the right hand side, Pharoah is depicted as a Christian king, his face is erased and he is accompanied by other knight-like figures, whose faces are also mostly obliterated—perhaps a way to debase persecutors of the Jews. There are also two griffin-headed figures, who mystified researchers until Epstein, who says his children helped him there, identified them as Datam and Aviram—Jews who can be thought of as having been defectors. They chose to emulate the Egyptians, and worked alongside them as taskmasters over Jews. Although Datam and Aviram are here identified as being Jewish, they are not deemed deserving of the identifying prestige of the Jewish hat.

[92] Epstein, 2011, p. 72

Figure 27. *Birds' Head Haggadah*, ca. 1300, The Israel Museum, MS 180/57 detail of f. 24v

On the left hand folio, a detail of which can be seen, below, in **Figure 28.**, the Israelites are preparing to leave Egypt, and we see them readying the dough which they will carry with them to become matzoh:

Figure 28. *Birds' Head Haggadah*, ca. 1300, The Israel Museum, MS 180/57 detail of f. 25r

As their griffin-heads attest, all of them are Jews, but we count only two among them who are wearing the *Judenhut*. On the leftmost, the leader of these figures, the hatted one in red, is Moses. He is holding a staff, which can't quite be seen in this detail,

although it can just be seen in **Figure 26.**, above. The other figure with the hat, on the far right, distributing the dough, is his brother Aaron. Both Moses and Aaron as they have assumed leadership of their people, have come closer to God and therefore merit their hats, but the soon to be freed slaves, while explicitly Jews, are seen as having been estranged from God through their years of slavery. They are not yet redeemed, and so for now, they are bareheaded.

Here again we see a reversal, where the *Judenhut* which was initially imposed on Jews with the purpose of identifying and being able to exclude them, has now been re-appropriated and used by Jews as a means of indicating their own inclusion or exclusion. As a symbol of belonging, it has become one of pride.

It seems fitting to close this chapter with the image accompanying the last hopeful prayer in every haggadah, which asks God to,

> *Rebuild Jerusalem, the holy city speedily in our days, and bring us up into it, and make us rejoice in it, and we will bless You in holiness and purity…NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM!*

Figure 29. *Birds' Head Haggadah*, ca. 1300, The Israel Museum, MS 180/57 f. 47r

Figure 29., above, then, is the last illustration in the *'Birds'* or *'Griffins' Head' Haggadah*, and in it we see a rebuilt Temple in a Jerusalem to which the Jewish people have returned. The figures in their contemporary tunics bridge the present and future, as they point upwards toward heaven, the source of their redemption, as one of them begins to enter the Temple.

The two front-most spires of the Temple which also reach upward, are each topped with a bird whose wings are spread wide. The birds represent freedom, and besides showing how different bird-heads look from the griffin-heads below, they also

add to the feeling that everything in this illustration is soaring upward, perhaps enabling those readers of the haggadah to feel themselves rise too, and glimpse their future.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

It may be seen as ironic that Jews who existed for the most part on the margins of their medieval societies, found ways to utilize the margins of their manuscripts to assert themselves and represent dreams and hopes they couldn't dare express in more overt ways. Jews may have been marginalized but they maintained an unshakeable faith in a different future for themselves which is evinced first in the haggadah text and then in the illustrations of the *Barcelona*, the *Golden* and the *Birds'* or *Griffins' Head* haggadot.

The images in these manuscripts show that the teaching of Jewish history as one tragic event after another; what the historian Salo Baron called and opposed as "the lachrymose conception of Jewish history" was only a part of a larger and more nuanced story. For, Baron insisted, in our history, along with suffering, there is "repeated joy as well as ultimate redemption."

That expectation of ultimate redemption comes through as aspiration in these haggadot.

In them, too, Jews found ways to take negative images of themselves and re-appropriate them so they emerged with positivity and light. They asserted images they wanted to represent themselves with audacity. They were able to intimate their own subtle versions of revenge, and at times, as they depicted a world upside-down, it became the one they wanted to live in, a world in which they showed themselves able to best, if only in imagined circumstances and images, those who oppressed them.

And as they did this, these Jewish artisans and their patrons found ways to realize that sense of hope, triumph and joy, that has enabled the Jewish people to live and

survive in the most difficult of times. For those medieval artists and craftspersons created a world in which their Jewish readers could find themselves and celebrate, each time they entered these manuscripts.

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