

The Illumination of the Worms Maḥzor*

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To Rachel Wischnitzer the doyen historian of Jewish Art —
a tribute on her hundredth birthday

Description and Iconographical Study

Bezalel Narkiss

THE ILLUMINATOR OF THE *Worms Maḥzor* worked in close collaboration with Simḥah bar Judah, the scribe who copied it and left spaces in traditional places for the artist's work. From an examination of the programme for the decoration, the lay-out of the pages and the relationship between text and illustrations, it is obvious that the scribe was responsible, as was usual during the Middle Ages, for the production of the entire manuscript. The artist had to comply with this programme, but was left the choice of models, as well as freedom to use his imagination and his personal style. The decoration programme for large prayer books of this type was already well developed by 1272, when the *Worms Maḥzor* was produced. Some earlier *mahzorim* have similar decoration programmes and have the same texts illustrated with similar subjects. These illustrations have been studied in part, some including the illustrations of the *Worms Maḥzor*.¹

To understand the decoration programme of the *Worms Maḥzor* it is essential to comprehend the structure of the text of the Ashkenazi *mahzorim*, since the illumination bears a direct relationship to it. It is also important to follow the historical development of the *mahzor* and its various liturgical components in order to decipher the traditional iconography of the illustrations.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE ASHKENAZI MAḤZOR

The term *mahzor* was used by the Ashkenazi Jews to denote a prayer book for the entire year. *Mahzor*, literally "cycle", indi-

cates the yearly recurrence of the three main festivals, the feast days and the fasts, which it had been the custom to observe in Judaism since Antiquity and which became fixed in the Middle East during the Middle Ages, and later in Europe. In biblical times, the ceremonies of the three main festivals, Pesah, Shavu'ot and Sukkot, called in Hebrew *Shalosh Regalim*, were primarily agricultural. Pesah, the spring festival, was regarded as the first of the three, occurring as it does in *aviv* (= spring), in biblical times the first month of the year, the time of spring and renewal. Shavu'ot, the Feast of Weeks, falling seven weeks after Pesah, was originally celebrated as an agricultural festival occurring just before the beginning of the harvest, when the farmer could already see the success of his crops. It is a short festival before the hard work of harvesting during the hot summer months. Sukkot, in the middle of the seventh month (later called Tishrei), is the autumn harvest festival (*asif*) in the Bible, and was also regarded as the main festival of the Temple. It is called *he-Hag* in Hebrew, "the festival". After gathering in the harvest, and ploughing and sowing his fields, the farmer could allow himself eight days of celebration while waiting and praying for the rains. The rainy winter months are a long agonizing period of uncertainty, with little work for the farmer to do.

However, in Second Temple times, following the Babylonian exile, the nature of the festival ceremonies changed gradually. Tishrei was fixed as the first month of the year, under the influence of the Babylonian calendar — as the Jerusalem Talmud states (*Rosh Hashanah*, 56d): "The names of the months came with them from Babylonia." Agriculture in Mesopotamia, where

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¹ See Narkiss, *Lipsiae*; Narkiss, *Tripartite Maḥzor*; Narkiss, *HIM*, pp. 31–33; Narkiss, *British Isles*, III [not yet published], Nos. 7–13; E. Róth, *Wormser Machsor*; Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*.

the fertile valley produces two crops a year and does not depend on rainfall, is completely different from agriculture in the Land of Israel. However, since the observance of the three Pilgrimage Festivals was so deeply rooted in the national tradition, their main ceremonies had to be adapted. This process took place during the Hellenistic period, when the small agricultural Jewish communities in Israel started to follow new customs (*minhag*). The destruction of the Second Temple hastened these changes, and new forms of Jewish expression emerged, enabling the nation to survive without any actual territory or state.

Prayer, replacing the Temple sacrifices, grew in importance, with new implications for the feasts. The historical aspects of the Festivals became central: Pesah became a commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt and the creation of the nation; Shavu'ot celebrated the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai; and Sukkot became the Feast of the Tabernacles.

By the mishnaic period, the new customs of the Jewish community were harmonized with the fixed text of the Torah through the use of a specific method of interpretation. The usual method of interpreting a given verse from the biblical laws was by reference to other verses of the Bible, and this method of interpretation, named *midrash* (from the term *lidrosh*, to call), became a flexible framework for the changes in customs to be reconciled with the words of the Torah.

Regular reading of the Torah was a deeply rooted custom in Judaism which, by the end of the second century C.E., took place on three days of each week: Saturday, the day of rest, and Monday and Thursday, the market days. Since not every Jew could participate on weekdays, reading the Torah in the synagogue on Saturdays became a firm custom. In Babylonia the custom was to complete reading the whole of the Torah in a single year, whereas in the Land of Israel it took three years. The Babylonian custom, which prevailed, divided the entire Torah into 54 portions (*parashot*), which were read consecutively, one portion each Sabbath, followed by readings of parts of the Prophets (*haftarot*). The reading of the Torah started with a portion of Genesis on the first Sabbath after the Feast of Sukkot, and ended the following year on the day of Rejoicing of the Torah (Simhat Torah) at the end of Sukkot. This annual cycle of reading the Torah is called *Mahzor shel ha-Miqra*, the Biblical Cycle.

The *Mahzor*, meaning a cyclic prayer book in mediaeval Germany, is based on the ancient tradition of the three Pilgrimage Festivals, starting with Pesah and ending with Sukkot, together with the cyclic Sabbath readings from the Torah beginning immediately after Sukkot. In addition there were the elaborate prayers for the High Holy Days, New Year and the Day of Atonement, as well as rituals for some special Sabbaths between Sukkot and Pesah.

The development of the daily and festival prayers during the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods gave rise to several different recensions of the prayers and their order (in Hebrew, *sefer*). Under Byzantine rule and its cultural influence during the fourth to seventh centuries, the order of daily Sabbath and festival prayers was augmented in the Land of Israel by a series of liturgical poems known as *piyyuṭim*, some of which found their way into the *Siddur* (order of prayers) and became an integral part of it for the rest of the Middle Ages, some even remaining to this very day. The *piyyuṭ* is an ingenious linguistic creation making use of biblical, midrashic and liturgical allusions, which are at times difficult to decipher. Of about 200 *payṭanim* from

these centuries only a few are known by name. Some would recite their works every Sabbath and feast day in their own synagogue, while others were itinerant poets. Like the midrashic interpreters, they had a vast knowledge of biblical, legal and legendary literature; and like the midrashic interpretations, most *piyyuṭim* were transmitted orally, some even being composed extempore in the synagogue in response to a word or a verse suggested by one of the community members. The Ashkenazi Jews were fascinated by the Byzantine type of *piyyuṭim*, which they used profusely, and also imitated in their own style. All these exist in the Ashkenazi *mahzor*. A detailed discussion on the *piyyuṭim* of the *Mahzor* can be found in E. Fleischer's Introduction (above, p. 36).

The structure of the Ashkenazi *mahzor*, which dictates its decoration programme, is neatly divided into two seasonal parts, the first relating to winter, spring and summer, and the second to autumn. The first part consists of three main sections: first, prayers for special Sabbaths between Sukkot and Pesah which also includes Purim; then come the prayers for Passover week; and lastly those for Shavu'ot. Some *mahzorim* also include in the first part the lamentations for the Ninth of Av — the day which commemorates the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem — and the penitential prayers for the month of Elul.

There are four special Sabbaths in the month of Adar, before and after the Feast of Purim. Each of these Sabbaths has an extra section of the Torah added to the weekly pericope (*parashah*), as well as additional special prayers. The four are: *Shabbat Sheqalim*, preceding the month of Adar (or of the second Adar in leap years); *Shabbat Zakhor*, before Purim; *Shabbat Parah*, which precedes the fourth; and *Shabbat ha-Hodesh*, before the month of Nisan. Two other Sabbaths are of special significance in the period between Sukkot and Pesah. One is the Sabbath which falls in Hanukkah (sometimes two Sabbaths), and the other is *Shabbat ha-Gadol* (the Great Sabbath) before Pesah. All these Sabbaths are included in the first section of the first part. As already mentioned, the second section is devoted to Pesah and the third to Shavu'ot.

The second part of the *Mahzor*, for the autumn season, comprises the prayers for the New Year, the Day of Atonement and the eight days of Sukkot.

Most Ashkenazi *mahzorim* also include four of the five *megillot* (scrolls), each of which is connected with a feast: the Song of Songs with Pesah, Ruth with Shavu'ot, Lamentations with the Ninth of Av, and Ecclesiastes with Sukkot. (The fifth scroll, *Megillat Esther*, is publicly read from an actual roll on Purim, and is hardly ever found in a *mahzor*.) The *megillot* are sometimes copied next to their feasts and sometimes collected together at the beginning or end of their respective parts.

The two seasonal parts of the *mahzor* are sometimes bound in two separate volumes, while other *mahzorim* consist of one or even three volumes.

Most mediaeval German *mahzorim* have the divisions into sections and sub-sections marked with a special decorative motif. The most common motif for a division is an arch or gateway (*sha'ar* in Hebrew). These gates became the symbol of an opening, which was developed by the illuminators of mediaeval Hebrew manuscripts, especially of Franco-German prayer books and Bibles.² A particularly apposite open gateway, closely related to the text, is the decorated arch which encloses the prayer for the morning of the Day of Atonement, which begins with the words: "Blessed art Thou, our God, King of the universe, who openest

² Arcaded opening pages of *mahzorim* can be seen in Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, Figs. 9, 10, 14, 16, 17, 21, 31, 32, 35, 37, 39, 40, 53, 71.

the Gates of Mercy for us." The decorated open gateway, sometimes shown with actual gates open, is a very common illustration for this prayer, and figures in the second volume of the *Worms Mahzor* (Vol. II, fol. 73r). In this case there is a townscape above the arch with domes, towers and gates, possibly representing the heavenly Jerusalem or the stylized gates of heaven.

THE DECORATION PROGRAMME OF THE WORMS MAHZOR

The decoration programme of the *Worms Mahzor* is only partly known, since its original second volume is missing and the present replacement is of a somewhat later date. We thus lack the original illustrations for the High Holy Days, New Year, the Day of Atonement and Sukkot. The replacement volume is sparsely illuminated and has only two text illustrations, both for the Day of Atonement: for the morning prayer (Vol. II, fol. 73r) there is an arch for "[God] who openest for us the Gates of Mercy"; and for the afternoon prayer (Vol. II, fol. 119v), there is a stylized rose for the *piyyuṭ* "The Rose of the Valley" (Davidson, III, p. 439, No. 765).³

The original first volume of the *Worms Mahzor* consists of three sections, one for the special Sabbaths (fols. 1v–41r), one for Pesah (fols. 41v–108v), and a third for Shavu'ot and the Ninth of Av (fols. 109r–184r); and some biblical books and passages are added at the end (fols. 185r–217v). The rest of the texts are replacements and additions (fols. 218r–224v).

The Arched Pages

The decoration programme follows the contents of the *Mahzor*. There are three arched pages opening the main divisions of the text (fols. 1v, 48v, 111r). All three arches contain the initial word of the *piyyuṭ* in the tympanum of the arch, and the arches also frame the text of the *piyyuṭ* itself for Pesah (fol. 48v) and Shavu'ot (fol. 111r). On the other hand, the arch for the first of the special Sabbaths (fol. 1v) appears above the second initial word and the text of the *piyyuṭ*. The difference between the first arch (fol. 1v) and the other two (fols. 48v, 111r) is probably not only the result of the former's prime position, but of being executed by a different hand (see below, Aliza Cohen-Mushlin's chapter: The Artistic Style of the *Mahzor*, pp. 00). The arches are flanked by heavy turrets, and are either surmounted by scenes or enclose them. The decorated pillars rest on animals, as was common in romanesque church portals, in Italy, and also existing in Germany.⁴ The commonest supporting animals are lions, as in two of our arcades (fols. 1v, 48v),⁵ but there are also others. The elephant and the long-necked camel-dragon which support the arch enclosing the Shavu'ot prayers in our *Mahzor* (fol. 111r) are unusual, but can also be found in other *mahzorim*.⁶ These animal supporters mainly appear in illuminated *mahzorim* of the thirteenth and

fourteenth centuries from Germany, and may suggest an unbroken tradition dating back to the twelfth century, when these motifs were in fashion. However, no Hebrew illuminated manuscripts have survived from the twelfth century and there is no evidence that any ever existed.

Text Illustrations and Panels

Text illustrations occur on these three arched pages, as well as adjacent to the initial words of the special Sabbaths prayer and the main divisions of the festival prayers. Marginal text illustrations also appear next to the prayer for Purim (fol. 19r), that for dew (fols. 57v–59v), and twice where the scribe's name is mentioned (fols. 95r, 129r). There are also several decorated initial words with no text illustrations, and some rubrication and pen decoration of initial words or letters within the text.

A consecutive description of the illustrations follows, dealing with their iconographical relation to the text as well as to other similar representations in Jewish and Christian art of the period.

The Special Sabbaths

Fol. 1v. Shabbat Sheqalim (Ex. xxx:11–16; Fig. 1). The pericope *כי תשא* starts by dealing with the payment of half a *sheqel* by every man "from twenty years old and above" as the basis for a census as well as an "atonement for your souls". In the centre of the arch, between the two columns, is a bird-beaked human figure wearing a red gown and holding a balance, the left pan of which is weighed down by a pile of coins. The inscription on both pans reads "*sheqel/Israel*". Professor Rachel Wischnitzer has proved that this illustration refers to the money-changers in the time of Herod's Temple (destroyed in 70 C.E.).⁷ The balance also appears in the initial word panel of the same *piyyuṭ* in the *Leipzig Mahzor* (Fig. 2).⁸ There, as here, two fierce animals flank the scale, alluding to satanic forces trying to tip the balance when souls are being weighed. The text of this *piyyuṭ*, *אל מתנשא* (Davidson, I, p. 178, No. 3853), stresses the connection between the payment of the half-*sheqel* and the judgement of God, who inscribes all men's good deeds in his book.⁹ In mediaeval man's eyes the balance probably evoked the idea of the Day of Judgement. As Jews and Christians alike commonly believed, and as depicted in many Christian paintings and sculptures,¹⁰ God sits in judgement on every man; the archangel Michael holds the balance, weighing the good and bad deeds, and at times an angel tries to weigh down the pan with the good deeds, or a devil pulls down that containing the bad deeds. One such representation was included in the signs of the zodiac in the *Dresden Volume* of the *Double Mahzor*.¹¹ Libra, for the month of Tishrei, is usually denoted by a hand holding a pair of scales. In the *Dresden Volume* a winged angel is standing on the pan containing the soul of a naked old man, while a claw-footed, tailed devil is clinging beneath the pan on the right (Fig. 3).

3 For stylized roses, see Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, Figs. 11, 12.

4 Examples of Italian church portals resting on lions are in the Duomo of Parma and San Zeno Maggiore in Verona; see Decker, *Romanesque Art*, Pls. 235, 260. An example in Germany is Königs-luther; see Gosebruch, *Königs-luther*, pp. 70–76, Figs. 28–35.

5 See Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, Figs. 9, 10, 17, 31.

6 E.g. the *Hammelburg Mahzor* of 1348, Darmstadt, Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, Cod. or. 13; the *Laud Mahzor*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Or. 321; and the *Dresden Volume* of the

Double Mahzor, Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, MS A.46a. See Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, Figs. 32, 37, 39, 40.

7 Wischnitzer, Money-changer.

8 Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, MS V. 1102, I, fol. 31v. See Narkiss, *Lipsiae*, p. 94; Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, pp. 21, 22, 32, 58, 59; Figs. 17, 18.

9 *Worms Mahzor*, fol. 2r: "They give their atonement ... to atone for their sins, and their righteousness Thou shouldest write in a book ..."

10 Christ, *Portails*, pp. 105–133; Pls. XVI–XIX.

11 Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, Fig. 74.

The presence of God in the *Worms Mahzor* illustration (fol. 1v; Fig. 1) is indicated by the initial word *El* (=God) written in ligature within the tympanum of the arch, and by his attendant servants, the sun and the moon. In the comparable panel of the *Leipzig Mahzor* (Fig. 2), flanking the ligature *El* there are four roundels with the Four Living Creatures of Ezekiel's vision (i:10), a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. These are depicted similarly to the usual representation of the symbols of the Four Evangelists of the New Testament, except for the man, who is dressed as a hooded monk holding a book. Although the four medallions allude to the wheels of Ezekiel's heavenly chariot, they also recall the single creatures of the Revelation of St. John (iv:6–7). A more pronouncedly Christian apocalyptic version appears in the opening prayer for the Day of Atonement in the *Breslau Volume* of the *Double Mahzor*,¹² illustrating the prayer for the "opening of the Gates of Mercy" (Fig. 4). Four roundels, which form the capitals and bases of the arch, enclose the Four Creatures, here winged and the man thus becoming an angel. On top of the arch is a fifth medallion with an empty throne. An empty throne awaiting the Judge for the Last Judgement is a common theme in Early Christian and Byzantine art.¹³ It is ultimately based on the visions of Ezekiel (i:26; x:2) and St. John (iv:2), as well as on several Psalms (ix:8; lxxxviii(lxxxix):15; ciii:19). Although Christian in concept, in a Hebrew manuscript the empty throne may allude to that of the Glory of God on his chariot. The German Hasidic sect in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries indulged in mystical allegorical representations of God, the study of which in Hebrew is called *merkavah*, the chariot of Ezekiel.¹⁴

The three dragons and the lion within the arch of the *Breslau Volume* are representatives of the devil, like the lions in our *Worms Mahzor*.

To conclude, the illustration on this first page represents God's judgement of his people, as seen through their tribute of money and good deeds.

Within the ligature of the *alef* is a Hebrew inscription by the original patron: שלי ברוך בר יצחק ז"ל, "Mine, Barukh bar Isaac", the first owner of the manuscript.

Fol. 9v. Shabbat Zakhor (Deut. xxv:17–19). The last section of the pericope *כי תצא* deals with the "remembrance" of what the Amalekites did to the Israelites in the battle on the journey from Egypt. The initial word panel is exceptional in not having a text illustration; it is merely decorated with geometric and floral motifs framing the orange coloured initial word on a black ground. In other *mahzorim* there are allusions to the battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites, with warriors appearing in the panels of the same *piyyut* *זכור את אשר עשה* (Davidson, II, p. 212, No. 112) in the *Michael Mahzor* of 1258, the *Archbishop Laud Mahzor* of c. 1260, the *Bamberg Mahzor* of 1279, and the *Hammelburg Mahzor* of 1348.¹⁵ Apart from the warrior, in the *Laud Mahzor* there is a scribe wearing a Jewish hat writing the beginning of Ex. xvii:14, "Write this for a memorial in a book".

Fol. 19r. Purim, the Feast of Esther, literally the Feast of the Casting of Lots, which Haman did in order to ascertain the right day and month to destroy all the Jews (Esther iii:6–7, 13). The prayer for Purim starts on fol. 15v with the *piyyut* *ויאהב אמן יתומת* *דהגן*, "The adopter [Mordechai] loved the orphan [Esther]" (Davidson, II, p. 186, No. 197). This *piyyut* in our *Mahzor* does not even have an initial word panel, whereas in the *Laud Mahzor* Ahasuerus is shown extending his sceptre to Esther across the panel.¹⁶ In the *Michael Mahzor* of 1258 there is a horizontal scene above this initial word panel with the hanging of Haman and his sons.¹⁷

Haman and his sons hanging from the branches of a large tree, which fills an entire text column, is the most common depiction in the monumental Ashkenazi *mahzorim*, and this is how they are shown in the *Worms Mahzor* on fol. 19r.¹⁸ The hanging scene is related to the *piyyut* *אספרה אל חוק*, "I will tell by inscribing" (Davidson, I, p. 317, No. 6978),¹⁹ which counts each of the days and months in which Haman cast lots, each with its zodiac sign and the main historical event of the month. The first month, Nisan, has the sign of the lamb, which was sacrificed for the Passover. The verse concerning the second month, Iyyar, with the sign of the bull, states that in that month "they hanged Haman" (Esther vii:10). As in other representations, Haman is hanging from the topmost branch and his ten sons hang from parallel branches on either side of the tree-trunk, whose roots spread out below. The branches in our case are foliage scrolls forming alternately green and blue medallions which contain the hanged men, their hands tied and their faces covered by their hair. The background outside the medallions is red and framed, the entire composition recalling the Tree of Jesse in illuminated Latin manuscripts and the stained glass windows of gothic churches.²⁰ No similar representation of the hanging of Haman and his sons is known to us in Latin manuscripts; it does, however, appear in similar form in earlier Hebrew illuminated Bibles, such as the *Kalonimos Bible* of 1238 in Breslau,²¹ and may have been based on an earlier model (Fig. 5).

Fol. 21r. Shabbat Parah (Num. xix:1–22). The pericope *חוקת* starts by dealing with El'azar the high priest slaughtering the red heifer, which is burnt, its ashes mixed with water and used to purify him "that toucheth the dead body". Flanking the initial word on the right is "El'azar the priest", wearing a pointed cap and holding up a knife; on the left is a red cow.

The *piyyut* *אום אשר בך רבוקה*, "A nation which clings unto Thee" (Davidson, I, p. 84, No. 1830), describes in detail all the rituals connected with the red heifer and the benefits that it brings to the nation and the individual Israelite. In most other *mahzorim* only the red cow is depicted,²² but a priest holding a sacrificial implement also appears in the *Laud Mahzor*²³ and in the *Bamberg Mahzor* (Fig. 6). This is probably a typically Jewish subject, unrelated to any Christian representation. However, the fact that in the *Laud Mahzor* the priest is holding a club rather than a slaughtering knife as in the *Worms Mahzor* may be an allusion to

12 MS Or. I. 1, fol. 89v; see Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, pp. 31–32, 45–46; Fig. 53.

13 E.g. Ravenna, Orthodox Baptistery of c. 450; see Volbach, *Early Christian*, Figs. 140, 141.

14 Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, pp. 31, 45; Scholem, *Mysticism*, pp. 84–106.

15 Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, pp. 22, 58–59; Figs. 19–20.

16 Fol. 48v. See Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, pp. 23, 58; Fig. 30.

17 Michael 617, fol. 16. See Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, pp. 23, 58; Fig. 29.

18 For other depictions, see Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, p. 23, 58; Figs. 25–28; cf. Narkiss, Lipsiae, p. 94.

19 It is not related to the following *piyyut*, *אמל ורבך* (Davidson, I, p. 261, No. 5713), as Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, p. 58, assumed.

20 Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, p. 45; Figs. 59–61; Saint-Denis, Chartres, see Watson, *Tree of Jesse*, pp. 112–125; Pls. XXIV, XXVI.

21 Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, p. 42; Fig. 54.

22 Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, pp. 58, 59; Figs. 21–24. The *Bamberg Mahzor* of 1279, New York, Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, MS Mic. 4843, fol. 15v, cf. Narkiss, *HIM in Hebrew*, Fig. 48.

23 Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, Fig. 23.

earlier depictions of the Roman-pagan method of killing by clubbing, rather than to the Jewish method of slaughtering.

Fol. 26v. Shabbat ha-Hodesh (Ex. xii:1–20). This section of the pericope בא is recited on the Sabbath before the 1st Nisan, the first month of the year according to the biblical reckoning with which it deals. The *piyyuṭ* ארת זה החודש, “The sign of this month” (Davidson, I, p. 95, No. 2051), praises the virtues of the month preferred by God and his past deeds during the month, and expresses a hope for the future messianic redemption of the nation.

The crescent moon and the star below it, to the left of the initial word, probably represents the new moon of the first of the month; whereas the lion rampant on the right may allude to the lion of the tribe of Judah, from which the Messiah will come. The lion may also be related to other fantastic animals, such as a unicorn, griffins and dragons, which figure in conjunction with the moon and star of this *piyyuṭ* in other *maḥzorim*.²⁴ These may represent other servants of God, angels, devils, or heavenly rulers of the world. Two lions flanking the scales or bearing up God’s chariot appear together with the moon and sun next to the name of God on the first page of our *Maḥzor* (fol. 1v).

The lion’s head drawn in the lower left-hand corner of the page is a doodle by the scribe.

Fol. 34v. Shabbat ha-Gadol, the “Great Sabbath” preceding the Passover, starts with the *piyyuṭ* אתי מלבנון כלה, “With me from Lebanon, O bride” (Cant. iv:8; Davidson, I, p. 403, No. 8891). The *piyyuṭ* is based on the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs as the love between the nation of Israel, the bride, and God, the bridegroom. The illustration for this *piyyuṭ* in our *Maḥzor* may be of an actual marriage ceremony. On the left is the bride, completely enveloped in a brown mantle with only her shoes protruding beneath a green dress, part of the ermine lining showing, and a slit for her face. The groom beside her wears a pointed Jewish hat on his curly blond hair, a green robe and a red mantle lined with ermine, and is holding its straps in his right hand. A *ṭalit* (=prayer shawl) covers both their heads, serving as a *ḥupah* (=canopy). To the right of the initial word is the officiant, wearing a Jewish hat, brown robe and red mantle, and holding a cup of wine for the benediction.

In most other *maḥzorim* the bride and groom are seated next to each other, sometimes in attitudes reminiscent of the Christian depiction of Christ crowning the Virgin on a *synthronos*.²⁵ It is interesting to note that in all these cases the groom, representing God, is shown in human form as a Jew, while the bride is sometimes crowned, recalling not only the Virgin but also the personification of Synagoga during the Middle Ages.²⁶

Professor Rachel Wischnitzer has a different thesis, namely that the bridegroom represents Israel and the bride the Torah, since it is difficult to accept that God is shown in human form.²⁷ However, a fourteenth-century commentary on the Ashkenazi *maḥzor* and its *piyyuṭim* states that “the poet compared the Almighty to a

bridegroom and the Community of Israel to a bride.”²⁸ Furthermore, the *Levi Maḥzor* of the fourteenth century depicts the bride as Synagoga, blindfolded.²⁹ In an allegorical representation it apparently did not bother the Jewish illuminator that God was depicted in human form.

A decorative element by the scribe may underline the allusion to a wedding. Within the first letter of the initial word is a knot, which appears in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century illuminated marriage contracts symbolizing the marriage bond,³⁰ and this symbol may have had its precursors in the Middle Ages.

Passover

Fol. 48v. First Day of Passover, morning prayer. The *piyyuṭ* אור ישע מאושרים, “Light of salvation to the blessed” (Davidson, I, p. 91, No. 1962), is dealing with the blessings of God to his people. Above the arch, which rests on two lions, is a depiction of the *Seder* (the Order of the Passover Eve ceremony). The scene has been badly cropped at the top by a later binder (Fig. 7).

At either end of the long table covered by a cloth two people can still be discerned, seated on decorated chairs. The one on the left is pointing to an open book inscribed with the opening words of the *Haggadah*: הא לחמא “This is the bread”. Behind the person on the right a spouted kettle hangs for washing the hands. The scene is rather similar to the illustrations on the first pages of the *Birds’ Heads Haggadah* of the late thirteenth century, where, on fols. 1v, 2r (Fig. 8) and 7r³¹ the husband and wife are seated on either side of a long table. Fol. 2r also has a similar kettle with a spout hanging above a basin.

A Passover *Seder* scene is an appropriate illustration for a *Haggadah*; but the *Maḥzor* does not include a *Haggadah* and it is hardly a suitable illustration for morning prayer on the First Day of Passover, following the *Seder* Eve. We can only assume that one of the models for the *Worms Maḥzor* was an illuminated *Haggadah* similar to the *Birds’ Heads Haggadah*, to which it is very close in style and colours as well as in motifs.³²

Fol. 54r. The Prayer for Dew in the *musaf* (additional prayer) for the First Day of Passover. Within the initial word ברעתו is a rhymed Yiddish blessing for the one who would carry the *Maḥzor* to the synagogue (see Ch. Shmeruk’s contribution below, pp. 100–103).

Fols. 57v–59v. A piyyuṭ for dew, אלים ביום מחוסן, by El’azar be-Rabbi Qilir (Davidson, I, p. 236, No. 5126), describes in eleven double strophes the twelve signs of the zodiac as related to the twelve Jewish lunar months from Nisan to Adar. The eleven double strophes have an acrostic of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The tenth strophe describes the two months Ṭvet and Shevaṭ and their signs together. In the left-hand margins of the entire *piyyuṭ* small medallions depict alternately the signs of the zodiac and the labours of the months, as commonly

24 See examples in Sed-Rajna, *Maḥzor*, pp. 58–59; Figs. 1, 2.

25 Sed-Rajna, *Maḥzor*, pp. 21, 46, 47, 58–59; Figs. 13–16, 64–67, 69.

26 Blumenkranz, *Ecclesia et Synagoga*, pp. 61–66; Figs. 68, 70; Bloch, *Ekklesia und Synagoge*, pp. 751–755; Figs. 67–70.

27 Wischnitzer, *Symbole*, p. 50; Narkiss, Lipsiae, p. 95.

28 השוואה הפייט הקב"ה לחתן ובנסה ישראל לכלה; Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, MS Heidenheim 139, fol. 2.

29 Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 37, fol. 169. See

Monumenta Judaica, No. D. 28, Pl. D. 18; Narkiss, *HIM in Hebrew*, p. 53, Fig. 49; Narkiss, Lipsiae, p. 95; Sed-Rajna, *Maḥzor*, p. 46.

30 See Fishof, *Ketubbot*, p. 231.

31 Spitzer, *Bird’s Head Haggadah* (Facsimile).

32 Besides the similarity in the bird-beaked human heads, there are some foliage scrolls, and the German Imperial heraldic spread eagle at the top of fol. 48v in the *Worms Maḥzor* appears on fol. 24v of the *Birds’ Head Haggadah* (see Figs. 7, 13).

found in the thirteenth century in the Latin calendars in psalters and breviaries.³³

The Signs of the Zodiac

The mediaeval Jewish signs of the zodiac are somewhat different from the Christian ones, in name as well as in image. The labours of the months, on the other hand, are based on mediaeval Christian ones, but like the latter they vary so much in their relation to the months that it is difficult to ascribe their sequence to any one source.

The zodiac signs for Capricorn and Aquarius differ in Jewish and Christian art. Capricorn usually appears as a kid in Jewish art, unlike the Roman and mediaeval goat. Its Hebrew name fits the image, *Gdi*, "kid". It also appears as a kid in late Antique Jewish representations of the zodiac, for example in the mosaic floors of early synagogues, such as the fourth-century synagogue at Hammath Tiberias³⁴ and the sixth-century one at Beit Alpha,³⁵ both of which have Hebrew inscriptions attached to the images of the signs. The same is true of Aquarius, which in Jewish tradition is represented by a bucket of water rather than by a man carrying a jar or pouring water from it, as in the Roman and mediaeval Christian sign. Aquarius is accordingly called *Dli* in Hebrew, "bucket", and in mediaeval Jewish art it is mostly shown as a draw-well with a bucket tied to the rope. Sometimes it is combined with Capricorn, with the kid pulling the bucket up from the well or drinking from the bucket, so that two months share one combined zodiac sign.

Other differences between the Jewish and Christian signs are found in Aries and Gemini. The sign of the first Jewish month, *Taleh*, which is a lamb in Hebrew, is usually a ram (Aries) in Christian art. Gemini are sometimes shown with animal or birds' heads in Ashkenazi *maḥzorim*, based on the Moslem depictions of the constellations,³⁶ whereas in German Christian art they sometimes appear as two knights in armour either fighting or embracing each other.³⁷

The earliest representations in Jewish art of the signs of the zodiac, symbolizing the annual cycle, appear in the Late Antique period. They were adopted from the Roman zodiac wheel, which also included personifications of the Four Seasons of the year in the spandrels. In the centre of the wheel is *Sol Invictus*, the victorious sun, in the shape of Helios driving his four-horse chariot.³⁸ The *piyyuṭ* on the signs of the zodiac by the late sixth-century poet El'azar be-Rabbi Qilir was no doubt inspired by these representations on the floors of the synagogues in his native Galilee. The agricultural and national hopes expressed in this *piyyuṭ* are combined with the prayer for the dew at Pesah. The inclusion of Qilir's *piyyuṭ* in the Judaeo-German prayer book led to its illustration with the Antique signs of the zodiac in their Jewish form.

Most of the names of the Hebrew lunar months, as well as their corresponding constellations, are of Babylonian origin. The

human and animal symbols for these constellations were called by the Greeks *zodion*, "little animals", and were adapted by the Greeks and Romans to the solar months, with the result that the zodiac sign changes about two-thirds of the way through a month. This relationship between the months and the zodiac signs, used since Antiquity, continued in use during the Middle Ages and well into modern times. The cycle begins with January and the sign of Capricorn in the Roman and Christian year, but with Nisan and the sign of *Taleh* (lamb) in the Jewish year.

During the twelfth to fifteenth centuries the Christians used the zodiac signs to illustrate calendars at the beginning of illuminated psalters and other prayer books, principally in England, France, Italy and Germany. The German zodiac signs were adopted almost in their entirety by the Jewish artists who illustrated the prayer for dew in Ashkenazi *maḥzorim*.

The Labours of the Months

The Christian calendars of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries also contain representations of the labours of the months, usually in roundels similar to those for the signs of the zodiac dating back to Antiquity. These representations are loosely related to the solar months and vary from one calendar to another, even in one regional group. James Carson Webster, who studied the labours of the months in Antique and mediaeval art up to the end of the twelfth century, did not find any complete agreement in the three German manuscripts which he compared, except in one case of reaping for August.³⁹ The lack of further published studies on German labours of the months in the thirteenth century precludes comparisons with the *Worms Maḥzor* and thus any deduction as to its origins. Only a few comparisons are used here, namely two of the twelfth-century ones which Webster made,⁴⁰ the *Würzburg Psalter* of c. 1240,⁴¹ the *Bamberg Psalter* of 1238–1245,⁴² and three Ashkenazi *maḥzorim* which contain the labours. These are our *Worms Maḥzor* of 1272, the *Budapest Volume* of the *Tripartite Maḥzor* of c. 1325,⁴³ and the unpublished early fourteenth-century *Passover Maḥzor* manuscript in New York.⁴⁴

A comparison between these seven manuscripts is not always possible, mainly because the Jewish lunar and the Christian solar months do not coincide, but also because in Christian calendars the labours come sometimes before, sometimes after the same zodiac sign, thus making correlation ambiguous.

Most labours depict agricultural activities, such as ploughing, digging with a mattock, sowing, mowing grass with a scythe, or reaping wheat with a sickle, threshing with a flail, grafting or pruning trees, harvesting or treading grapes for the vintage, and even cutting firewood for winter and slaughtering pigs or oxen for winter food. Other occupations, most of which a modern eye will not consider to be work, relate to leisure and festivity, such as eating, drinking, music and dancing, or preparations such as dressing a pig. Yet others are coursing hares, fowling and hawk-

33 Sed-Rajna, *Maḥzor*, pp. 32–37; Figs. 72–83.

34 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*.

35 Sukenik, *Beth Alpha*.

36 Sed-Rajna, *Maḥzor*, Figs. 72, 75–78; Ameisenowa, *Animal heads*, p. 32.

37 Sed-Rajna, *Maḥzor*, Figs. 80–83.

38 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, pp. 39–43.

39 Webster, *Months*, p. 178.

40 Webster, *Months*, pp. 86–88, 168–170; Fig. 89. They are: Webster, No. 87, *Henry the Lion Psalter*, of 1175–1185, London, British Library, Lansdowne 381; and Webster, No. 89, *Chronicon Zwifaltense Minus*, Stuttgart, Königliche öffentliche Bibliothek, MS Hist., fol. 415.

41 Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm. 3900. See Swarzenski, *XIII Cent.*, No. 86, pp. 73, 157–159; Figs. 936–981.

42 Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Bibl. 48. See Rothe, *Bamberg*, Pls. 3–14.

43 Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Kaufmann Collection, MS A. 384. See Sed-Rajna, *Maḥzor*, p. 35; Figs. 76, 77. Dr Sed-Rajna, made a comparative table of the Labours of the Months (*Maḥzor*, pp. 35–37), and is of a different opinion regarding the variants.

44 New York, Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Mic. 4809.

ing; a man or woman carrying flowers appears in the spring months; and warming one's feet by a fire is a winter activity.

The following table compares the labours of the months from Hebrew and Latin manuscripts of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries in Germany.

From the table it is obvious that although no set of labours corresponds exactly with any other, sections of some manuscripts do follow a certain tradition. For example, the Hebrew *Passover Mahzor* and the Latin *Bamberg Psalter* coincide from Tammuz (July) to Adar (March) except for Heshvan (November) and Kislev (December). These labours are also fairly close in sequence to the twelfth-century *Zwifaltense Chronicon* and the *Psalter of Henry the Lion*. The *Worms Mahzor* seems not to belong to this recension, although some of its labours come either one month before or one month after those in the *Würzburg* and *Bamberg Psalters* and the *Passover Mahzor*. The labours in the *Worms Mahzor* also anticipate by one or two months some of those in the *Tripartite Mahzor*. If, as G. Sed-Rajna suggested (*Mahzor*, pp. 35–37), the labours in the *Worms Mahzor* precede and not succeed their zodiac signs, there might be further correlation between the *Worms* and the other two Hebrew *Mahzorim*.

Two pairs of labours seem to follow each other in most sets, but bear no relation to specific months: one pair is mowing and reaping, and the other ox or pig killing followed by warming one's feet.

In conclusion, it seems that no complete correlation can be found between the labours of the months in the *Worms Mahzor* and the Franconian recension of *Würzburg* and *Bamberg*, which corresponds to the earlier *Psalter of Henry the Lion* from Hemarshausen. Only a few depictions correspond, and further investigations may indicate other sources for the *Worms* labours of the months.

We turn now to a description of the illustrations of the signs of the zodiac and of the labours of the months.

Fol. 57v. In the top medallion is the lamb (טלה), the zodiac sign for Nisan (mainly April), and below it a medallion with a flower bearer a bird-headed figure crowned with a wreath of flowers and picking spring flowers. In the *Passover Mahzor* the woman flower bearer represents the labour for Sivan (June; on fol. 82r). The *Budapest Volume* of the *Tripartite Mahzor* has a woman sitting among flowers with a hawk on her wrist for the labour of Sivan.⁴⁵

Fol. 58r. In the top medallion is the bull (שור), the sign of Iyyar (May), and below it a man digging with a mattock. In the *Budapest Mahzor* this appears two strophes later as the labour for Tammuz. This pair of medallions is the closest to the illustration in the calendar of the *Würzburg Psalter* (Fig. 9).⁴⁶

The twins (תאומים), the sign of Sivan (June) are shown as two bird-headed youths in discussion. In other *mahzorim* the twins vary, although most of them have some combination of animal heads or blank faces; some of them are embracing.⁴⁷ The labour for Sivan shows a man mowing with a scythe, wearing a hood which covers his face. Mowing occurs one strophe later in the *Passover Mahzor* and two strophes later in the *Tripartite Mahzor*. Cancer (סרטן), the sign of Tammuz (July), is the last medallion on this page, the corresponding labour being on the next page.

Fol. 58v. The bird-headed reaper, wearing a peasant's hat, is wielding a sickle. Behind him is a bound sheaf of corn. In the *Passover Mahzor* this labour appears one strophe and in the *Tripartite Mahzor* two strophes later.

The lion (אריה) for Av (August) is in the next medallion and below it is a bird-headed man ploughing with a two-wheeled plough. Ploughing is similarly depicted as the labour for Nisan in the *Passover Mahzor* (fol. 80v), but the plough there has no wheels.⁴⁸ Ploughing is not included in the *Tripartite Mahzor*.

The virgin (בתולה), for Elul (September), is a woman with a bird's head, crowned and holding a flower in her right hand. The medallion with the labour shows a man sowing a ploughed field with a sack tied round his waist. Sowing features in the *Passover Mahzor* (fol. 85r) one strophe later, next to the sign of the scales, and later still, as the labour for Shevaṭ (February), in the *Tripartite Mahzor*.

Fol. 59r. The pair of scales (מאונים) for Tishrei (October) appears at the top of the page held by a hand. The month's labour is the vintage, with a bird-headed man gathering grapes into a basket. The vintage appears one strophe later in the *Tripartite Mahzor* and one strophe earlier in the *Passover Mahzor* (fol. 84r). The scorpion (עקרב), with a twisted tail, is the sign of Heshvan (November). It is usually shown as a tortoise with a decorated shell, but in the *Michael Mahzor* it is a winged creature with a long tail.⁴⁹ The labour for Heshvan is killing an ox with an axe, just as slaughtering pigs is usually shown in the Christian labours for December. A similar ox killing appears in the strophe for Heshvan in the *Passover Mahzor* (fol. 85v) and one strophe later in the *Tripartite Mahzor*. Ox killing is not a frequent labour in Christian calendars, but it does appear in the *Zwifaltense Chronicon* as a labour for the same month, November.

The bow (קשת) is the sign of Kislev (December). In most *mahzorim* only a bow and arrow are depicted in the medallion; in the *Worms Mahzor*, however, a man is shooting an arrow.

Fol. 59v. At the top of the page is the "labour" for Kislev (December). A man is sitting warming his feet at a fire with a drinking cup in one hand and holding his shoe in the other. The scene appears for the following strophe in both the *Tripartite* and the *Passover Mahzorim*. A man drinking wine by the fire illustrates the same strophe in the *Passover Mahzor* (fol. 86v).

The next medallion contains the signs for both Tevet (January) and Shevaṭ (February). The kid (גדי), instead of capricorn, is standing on its hind legs holding in its forefeet the bucket (דלי) which has been raised from the draw-well and which represents Aquarius. Most *mahzorim* have the same combination, although in some cases the signs are separate.⁵⁰ The labour is represented by a man wearing a hat who is pruning a tree with a pruning hook. This probably relates to the second of the two combined months, which is nearer to its usual place as the labour for Adar. A man pruning appears next to the last strophe of the *Passover Mahzor* (fol. 88r), but is not included in the *Tripartite Mahzor*. The last sign of the zodiac is the fish (דגים) for Adar (March). Two reversed fish are depicted vertically, unlike the horizontal fish in all the other *mahzorim*. No labour is shown for Adar in the *Worms Mahzor*, but woodcutting is shown in the *Tripartite Mahzor* and pruning in the *Passover Mahzor*.

45 Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, Fig. 77.

46 Clm. 3900, fol. 3, starting with the month of April.

47 See Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, Figs. 72–83.

48 Ploughing with a wheeled plough can be found in the calendar of a

Breviary from Basle from after 1235, St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 402. See Swarzenski, *XIII Cent.*, Fig. 456.

49 Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, Fig. 72.

50 Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, Figs. 72–79.

Bezael Narkiss
The Labours of the Months

Names of Months	Sign of Zodiac	Hebrew			Latin			
		Worms Mahzor 1272	Mahzor Tripartite c. 1325	Passover Mahzor c. 1300	Würzburg Psalter c. 1240	Bamberg Psalter 1245-1283	Henry the Lion's Psalter c. 1175	Zwifaltense Chronicon mid 12th century
Nissan April	Lamb Aries	Flower bearer	—	Ploughing	Digging	Digging	Digging	Flower bearer
Iyyar May	Bull Taurus	Digging	Grafting	Hawking	Grafting	Grafting	Grafting	Fowling
Sivan June	Twins Gemini	Mowing	Hawking or flower bearer	Flower bearer	Ploughing	Ploughing	Ploughing	Ploughing
Tammuz July	Crab Cancer	Reaping	Digging	Mowing	Stacking hay	Mowing	Mowing	Mowing
Av August	Lion Leo	Ploughing	Mowing	Reaping	Mowing	Reaping	Reaping	Reaping
Elul September	Virgin Virgo	Sowing	Reaping	Vintage	Vintage	Vintage	Vintage	Sowing
Tishrei October	Scales Libra	Vintage	Threshing	Sowing	Sowing	Sowing	Sowing	Vintage
Marḥeshvan November	Scorpion Scorpio	Ox killing	Vintage	Ox killing	Threshing	Threshing	Threshing	Ox killing
Kislev December	Bow Sagittarius	Warming oneself	Ox Killing	Feasting	Pig killing	Pig killing	Pig killing	Pig killing
Tevet January	Kid Capricorn	—	Warming oneself	Warming oneself	Warming oneself	Warming oneself	Warming oneself	Hare hunting
Shevat February	Bucket Aquarius	Pruning	Sowing	Wood cutting	Wood cutting	Wood cutting	Wood cutting	Wood cutting
Adar March	Fish Pisces	—	Wood cutting	Pruning	Pruning	Pruning	Pruning	Pruning

The *piyyut* for dew, which mentions the names of the months and their zodiac signs, evoked the artists of the Ashkenazi *mahzorim* to illustrate them with signs of the zodiac. The fact that three of the *mahzorim* have in addition the labours of the months, may point to an origin in calendars of Latin Psalters, both for the signs and the labours. Even if the exact origin of the signs and labours in the *Worms Mahzor* is unknown to us, their similarity to the Franconian Psalters, especially to the *Würzburg Psalter* of the late thirteenth century, points to a direction of future research.

This concludes the *piyyut* for dew and the illustrations of the zodiac signs and the labours of the months. The prayers for the rest of the days in Passover week follow, some decorated with panels, but with no text illustrations.

The Last Days of Passover

Fol. 77v. Passover, seventh day, morning prayer. The initial word of the *piyyut* פרוח שושני פרוח (Davidson, II, p. 189, No. 245) is decorated with dragon's heads, a mask and geometrical denticulations in red.

Fol. 89v. Passover, last day. The initial word of the *piyyut* אלה הארת יומם ולילה (Davidson, I, p. 396, No. 8745) is decorated with thin scrolls forming borders for the letters, and an eye in the centre of the middle letter. This *piyyut* was not recited in Worms, as a note in the margin states. It was replaced by another *piyyut* at some point not much later than 1272 (see Beit-Arié's Introduction above, p. 20).

Fol. 93r. Passover, last day. Next to the initial word of the *piyyut* שבטי יה הוצאתה לפריזום (Davidson, III, p. 414, No. 262) is a green dragon with red wings and a bird's talons, turning its head backwards.

Fol. 95r. Passover, last day. In the inner lower margin, next to the word וסופריי ("and my scribes") in the text, is a man pointing at the word and lifting an open book inscribed with three names: "Judah the scribe of Nuremberg, Simḥah the scribe, Shemaiah the Frenchman" (יהודה הסופר מנורנברק שמחה הסופר שמעיה) (הצרפנתי). The first was the scribe's father, the second the scribe of the manuscript, and the third, Shemaiah, was probably the artist of the *Worms Mahzor*.

The Giving of the Law on Shavu'ot

Fol. 111r. Shavu'ot, first day, morning prayer. The *piyyuṭ* ארון אמני (Davidson, I, p. 24, No. 464) deals with the Torah, which dwelt with God and was trained by him to become the basis for Jewish law and life. In most *maḥzorim*, as in the *Worms Maḥzor*, the illustration is of Moses receiving the Tablets of the Covenant and transmitting them to Israel. Above the decorated arch there are two men kneeling and three standing, their hands raised in adoration of the two green tablets, framed in red, which are descending from heaven, next to a long horn. The fact that a later binder has cropped the top of the page makes it impossible to reconstruct the upper part of the scene. Were there angels blowing horns as in the *Dresden Maḥzor* (fol. 202v), or holding the tablets, as in the *Laud Maḥzor* (fol. 127v; Fig. 10)? Although mutilated, the tablets seem to have round and not square tops. Each of the five people above the arch and the six people within the towers and under the arch, carries a banderole inscribed with one of the Ten Commandments (Ex. xx:2–17). The second kneeling person on the left is probably Moses, who carries a banderole with the inscription which can be deciphered as Ex. xix:3 [וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה אֶל הַאֱלֹהִים] “and Moses went up unto God”.⁵¹ The inscribed Commandments start with the introduction “I am the Lord thy God” etc. (Ex. xx:2), carried by the first kneeling person on the left above the arch. The rest of the inscriptions on the banderoles above the arch with the second, third and fourth commandments are illegible. The last six commandments follow a strange sequence. They start with the fifth commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother” (Ex. xx:12), at the top of the right-hand tower, and then jump to the top of the left tower with the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex. xx:13); the sequence continues below on the same tower with “Thou shalt not commit adultery”; and then reverts to the right tower with “Thou shalt not steal”. The last two commandments are seen below the arch from right to left: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” and “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house” etc. (Ex. xx:16–17).

None of the bird-headed people, all with beards and wearing pointed Jewish hats, actually illustrates any of the Ten Commandments: they simply present the text. Illustrations for the Ten Commandments are very rare in Jewish mediaeval art. There is, however, one example in a manuscript which is close in style to the *Worms Maḥzor* and which may have originated in the same region. This is a tiny pocket *maḥzor* in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.⁵²

Fol. 116v. The colourful effect of the initial word panel for the *piyyuṭ* שַׁעֲשׂוּ יוֹם יוֹם (Davidson, III, p. 506, No. 2087) for Shavu'ot is achieved through the interplay of four colours, green, vermilion and magenta, on a blue ground. In the lower left-hand corner is a pen-drawn winged creature with a bird's head and feet with one bare human foot.

Fol. 125r. The initial word of the *piyyuṭ* אתה הנחלתה תורה (Davidson, I, p. 398, No. 8788) is coloured in brown, blue and green, and surrounded by elaborate coloured pen scrolls with dragons and birds. This is the beginning of a *piyyuṭ* listing all the

613 precepts of the five books of the Torah. The last section deals with the precepts for the priests of the house of Levi, which relate to the next illustration on fol. 129r.

Fol. 129r. In the lower margin the Levite placing the round wafer of a *mazzah* into an oven with a long-handed tray, to bake the daily sacrifice mentioned in the Bible (Lev. ii:4–5; vi:16–17; vii:12–13). Behind him is a tray with two more *mazzot*. The daily baking of ritual *mazzot* for priests is illustrated on the opening page of the prayer for Shavu'ot in *Archbishop Laud's Maḥzor* (Fig. 10), which includes the giving of the Law and God's covenant with the Israelites.⁵³

Fol. 130v. Shavu'ot, second day, morning prayer. The *piyyuṭ* אילת אהבים, “A loving hind, a gift of Sinai” (Davidson, I, p. 138, No. 2960, based on Prov. v:19) has a text illustration. The “loving hind”, the personification of Israel, is being hunted by a devil with dark talons who is blowing a horn. His dogs are chasing the hind and one of them has it by the leg. A deer hunt became a common symbol of the suppressed and persecuted Jews in Europe of the thirteenth century, and numerous depictions of such hunts are to be found in other Hebrew illuminated manuscripts from Germany from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries.

Fol. 133v. Shavu'ot. The initial words of the *piyyuṭ* ה' קנני קנני, fifth part of the *qerovah* ארץ מטה ורעשה (Davidson, I, p. 349, No. 7694), written in dark brown and red, is surrounded by colourful pen scrolls and dragon's heads.

Fol. 146r. Shavu'ot. The initial word of the *piyyuṭ* אקדמות מילין (Davidson, I, p. 332, No. 7314) is written in gold, which has flaked off, on a blue-green ground.

THE BIRDS' HEADS

One of the most intriguing aspects of the *Worms Maḥzor* are the pronounced birds' beaks which appear on most of the human faces. These are all exaggerated, and shown in profile with nose and mouth combined. As a motif they appear in other manuscripts of the group. Most human faces in the *Birds' Heads Haggadah* have similar large, beak-like noses (Fig. 11).⁵⁴ In the *Leipzig Maḥzor*, which was copied by the same scribe as the *Birds' Heads Haggadah*, Menaḥem, the birds' beaks are a feature of all the faces, but are not so pronounced (Vol. I, fol. 130v; Fig. 12).⁵⁵ The appearance of the birds' beaks in all three manuscripts of the same group precludes a chance phenomenon. It must have had a special meaning for the artists as well as for the patrons of all three manuscripts. In his preface to the publication of the *Birds' Heads Haggadah* Professor Meyer Schapiro stressed the resemblance of the bird-headed Jews to eagles,⁵⁶ and pointed to some biblical texts (e.g. Ex. xix:4; Deut. xxxii:11) where the salvation of the people was achieved by God who, like an eagle bearing its young, carried his nation on his wings. This may have inspired the artist to use eagle's heads, but it does not fully explain the phenomenon, especially where figures with negative connota-

51 See *Selected Manuscripts*, No. 33, p. 22.

52 Mic. 8972. See Narkiss, *Ten Commandments*, pp. 389–407.

53 Narkiss, *HIM*, Pl. 27, p. 94.

54 Spitzer, *Bird's Head Haggadah, Facsimile Edition and Introductory Volume*, pp. 17–18, 69–72.

55 Narkiss, *Lipsiae*, pp. 102–103.

56 Shapiro in Spitzer, *Bird's Head Haggadah*, pp. 17–18.

tions, such as soldiers in Pharaoh's army, have birds' heads (fol. 24v; Fig. 13).

Another attempt at an interpretation has been made by Dr. Heinrich Strauss, who regards distortion of the human face as a means of overcoming an anti-semitic image.⁵⁷ Strauss mentions that, as a minority, the Jews in mediaeval Ashkenaz had to defend themselves on a spiritual and psychological level, as well as on the physical and economic front. Overcoming an anti-semitic image by identifying with it, that is by the Jew depicting himself with a large, beak-like nose, may provide an explanation of the beaked noses in the *Worms Mahzor* and the *Birds' Heads Haggadah*, but it does not explain other methods of distorting the human face. It is hardly credible that these manuscripts were executed by anti-semitic Christian artists, because the Jews simply would not have used them. Moreover, a Christian artist would not have been able to show special Jewish customs or to make messianic allusions without the guidance of a Jew.⁵⁸

Both these interpretations assume that there is some special significance in the birds' heads, whether positive or negative. They both follow the opinion of the late Zofja Ameisenowa, who observed distortions of human heads in earlier Hebrew illuminated manuscripts. Interpreting the Feast of the Righteous in Paradise at the end of the *Ambrosian Bible* of 1238 (Vol. III, fol. 135r; Fig. 14),⁵⁹ Ameisenowa concluded that they depend on earlier animal-headed gods, evangelists, saints and righteous men in Moslem and Christian art, and therefore must have had similar connotations in Jewish art.⁶⁰ Her arguments, however, while they are applicable to the representations of the righteous and virtuous, fail to explain the fact that in the same manuscripts disreputable people, such as the hunter of the "loving hind" (fol. 130v), are similarly distorted and given animal and birds' heads. Distortion of the human face in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts was common and widespread during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in southern and central Germany, and the devices used differ from one group to another.⁶¹ The earliest device is to show people with blank faces, as in the *Rashi Commentary* from Würzburg of 1232/3 (Fig. 15).⁶² In fact, the draughtsman of the *Rashi Commentary* did draw facial features, sometimes in profile but mostly *en face*; however, the colourist who followed him overpainted them all with zinc white, which oxidized in time to a murky grey. The *Ambrosian Bible* of 1236–1238 (Fig. 14) from Uhlm and the *Kalonymus Bible* of 1238 (Fig. 5)⁶³ both have some blank faces, or faces covered by hats or hair, or figures seen from behind. The same methods of covering faces are used in the *Michael Mahzor* of 1258,⁶⁴ and the *Double Mahzor* of c. 1290.⁶⁵ Animal and bird heads and blank faces

appear together in the *Archbishop Laud Mahzor* of c. 1260 (Fig. 10),⁶⁶ but in the *Tripartite Mahzor* of c. 1325⁶⁷ all the men have human faces, while the women have animal heads.

These variations imply only that there must have been an intention and need for the Jewish artist of southern Germany to refrain from explicitly depicting the human face. He either distorted or hid faces, but the methods varied in different schools and periods. Most of the figures in the *Worms Mahzor* have birds' heads, although some have human faces; and there are other means of distorting faces. The human heads in the *Worms Mahzor* are those of El'azar the priest about to kill the red heifer (fol. 21r), the bridegroom and possibly the celebrant in the wedding ceremony (fol. 34v), as well as the scribe holding the inscribed book (fol. 95r). Examples of distorted faces in the *Worms Mahzor* are the animal-headed devil hunting the "loving hind" (fol. 130v) and the faces of Haman and his ten sons covered by their long hair. Likewise, the *Birds' Heads Haggadah* has a servant with a bulbous nose (fol. 7v), soldiers with helmets covering their faces (fol. 24v; Fig. 13), and angels with human (fol. 33r) or featureless faces (fol. 15v).

It seems that the Würzburg school of Hebrew illumination at the end of the thirteenth century followed the tradition of hiding or distorting faces mainly by using birds' beaks, animal heads, and some featureless faces, although they also depicted human facial features, which may indicate less strictness in this case.

This is, in fact, the earliest school of Hebrew illumination known to us which depicts human figures. An earlier group of illumination which existed in the East during the ninth to twelfth centuries avoided any depiction of human figures, probably under the influence of Islamic prohibition to depict figures in religious objects. The Sephardi school which flourished in Spain from the mid-thirteenth century on followed at first the Eastern tradition, but from around 1300 human figures were portrayed with regular facial features.⁶⁸

What, then, was the cause for distortion of human faces in Ashkenazi manuscripts of the early thirteenth century? Were there any theological directions from rabbis or spiritual leaders of the Ashkenazi communities which made it necessary to distort the human face? The late Hans Jaffé suggested, in his introduction to the *Birds' Heads Haggadah*, that a *responsum* by R. Ephraim of Regensburg, who died c. 1175, objecting to the depiction of three-dimensional human faces, was responsible for this practice.⁶⁹ However, R. Ephraim ben Isaac of Regensburg, whose *responsa* were widely known, was a controversial Tosafist, rather lenient in his opinions. For example, he permitted services in a synagogue where Torah mantles and circumcision jackets

57 Strauss, *Kunst der Juden*, pp. 58–61; Figs. 16–23.

58 Narkiss in Spitzer, *Bird's Head Haggadah*, pp. 89–110.

59 Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS B. 30–32 inf. See Narkiss, *HIM*, Pl. 25, p. 90, and bibliography on p. 170.

60 Ameisenowa, *Gastmahl*; Ameisenowa, *Animal heads*.

61 Narkiss, *Zoocephalic*, pp. 49–54.

62 The so-called *Rashi Commentary* is in fact an eclectic text, of which Rashi is only a basic part. The commentaries are complete only for the Pentateuch, Latter Prophets and the Hagiographa. The commentary on the Former Prophets (Joshua to Kings) pertains only to the sections of the *haftarot* read in the synagogue. No substantial section of text is missing, and the recto of fol. 1 of the second volume (now glued to another folio) contains the original text of the end of the book of II Kings. The manuscript is in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Heb. 5 I–II. See Swarzenski, *XIII Cent.*, p. 72, Figs. 982–985; Spitzer, *Bird's Head Haggadah*, Pls. 1, 2, 4; Gutmann, *Manuscript*, p. 17, Pl. 17.

63 Breslau, University Library, MS M. 1106. See *Fragments*, No. 6; Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, Fig. 54.

64 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Mich. 617 and 627. See Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, pp. 63–64; Figs. 1, 19, 29, 72.

65 Vol. I: Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, MS A. 46a; Vol. II: Breslau, University Library, MS Or. I, 1; Wischnitzer, *Messianic Fox*, p. 263. See Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, pp. 67–68 with bibliography; Figs. 6, 8, 10, 26, 40, 45, 53, 74, 75. Narkiss, *HIM in Hebrew*, pp. 44, 52, 54; Figs. 46, 53.

66 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Or. 321. See Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, pp. 64–66; Figs. 2, 13, 20, 23, 25, 30, 35, 39, 43, 44, 47, 48, 51, 52, 73; Narkiss, *HIM*, pp. 94, 170; Pl. 27.

67 Vol. I: Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, MS A. 384; Vol. II: London, British Library, MS Add. 22413; Vol. III: Oxford Bodleian Library, MS Mich. 619. See Narkiss, *Tripartite Mahzor*; Sed-Rajna, *Mahzor*, pp. 71–75, with bibliography; Figs. 4, 7, 16, 18, 21, 34, 36, 38, 42, 49, 50, 77. Narkiss, *HIM in Hebrew*, pp. 44, 51, 52, 54, 133, 135; Pls. 33, 34.

68 Narkiss, *HIM* pp. 18–22; Narkiss, *British Isles*, I, p. 15.

69 Jaffé in Spitzer, *Bird's Head Haggadah*, pp. 69–72.

decorated with images were displayed on the *bimah*.⁷⁰ His leniency contrasts with other Ashkenazi Tosafists of his time, such as R. Eliaqim ben Joseph of Mainz, who opposed the painting of lions and snakes on the windows and walls of the synagogue at Cologne. This opinion was quoted by R. Isaac of Vienna (c. 1180–c. 1260) in a *responsum*, where he adds that he too forbade in his youth “painting of birds and trees” in the synagogue at Meissen.⁷¹ An even stricter view was expressed by R. Judah ben Samuel the Pious (c. 1150–1217), the leader of the late twelfth- and thirteenth-century Ashkenazi Hasidic movement. In the collection of moralistic stories (*gesta*-like) which he composed, he stressed his aversion to any adornment in home or clothing, and in his ascetic attitude prohibited any illumination in manuscripts and even the decoration of the Bible with figured *massorah* outlined in micrography. He rightly thought that this way of writing the *massorah* makes it illegible. In his own words, “one who hires a scribe to write the *massorah* for the Twenty-Four Books should make it a condition for the scribe that he does not make the *massorah* in the form of birds, beasts or a tree, and likewise inserts no other illustrations, as they have started to write the *massorah* in the Book”.⁷²

In spite of such strict decrees, the custom of decorating Bibles with figured *massorah* continued to flourish in Germany during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. There is hardly a single Ashkenazi Bible without it, and some have the most elaborate human figures, animals, birds and trees, for example in *Shlomo Hacoheh Pentateuch* of 1294, in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale (hébr. 5, fol. 117v; Fig. 16).⁷³ Moreover, many schools of illumination flourished in Germany during these centuries, and the earlier prohibitions on depicting human faces were not observed. Through tradition, some artists did continue to put bird and animal heads on human figures, but by the end of the thirteenth century the various methods were so confused that in the *Worms Mahzor* even facial features were added at random to some figures. At the beginning of the fourteenth century some artists continued to follow the tradition, such as the artist of the *Leipzig Mahzor*; others, out of spite or misunderstanding, for instance in the *Tripartite Mahzor* and its related South German manuscripts, only gave women animal heads, while their men had human ones.

At the end of the thirteenth century R. Me’ir ben Barukh, the Maharam of Rothenburg (died 1293), the most authoritative rabbi of Ashkenaz at the time, dealt explicitly with the question of decorating *mahzorim* with animals and birds. He stated “that it is certainly not proper to do so, since when they look at these figures, they divert their hearts from their Father in Heaven. However, these do not fall under the prohibition [of the Second Commandment], ‘Thou shalt not make unto thee any sculpture...’ (Ex. xx:4–5).”⁷⁴ He further stresses that paintings which

are merely flat and two-dimensional are executed “with different colours and have no substance”, “whereas there is some fear [of idolatry] only when it is in relief on a protruding object...and I think”, states the Maharam, “that even a Jew is allowed to make images with colours... but it is prohibited to sculpt a complete face...”⁷⁵ It transpires that the Maharam did not consider it proper to decorate prayer books, but that he did not proscribe illumination in manuscripts, whose existence proves that they continued to be produced.

The Maharam of Rothenburg may have personally been connected with the *Birds’ Heads Haggadah*, although he was not mentioned in the manuscript, and the custom of benediction over the first washing of hands is against his decree.⁷⁶ The illumination on the last page of the *Haggadah* may depict Jews honouring the Maharam in the Heavenly Jerusalem, after he failed in his attempt to reach the earthly Jerusalem, being arrested on his way thither and imprisoned in the castle of Ensisheim by King Rudolf I of Hapsburg until his death in 1293 (Fig. 11).⁷⁷ The illustration appears opposite the page which carries the verse “Next year in Jerusalem”. This is the first time that this verse appears in a *Haggadah*. His students and followers allowed themselves to create illuminated manuscripts in his honour, in spite of his disapproval.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century R. Jacob bar Asher Ba’al ha-Ṭurim (c. 1270–1343), the son of R. Asher ben Yehiel (the Rosh, c. 1250–1327, who was a devoted pupil of the Maharam), fled in 1303 with his father from the persecutions in Germany and settled in Barcelona and Toledo, implies the idea of distortion of the human head in art. In his *Tur Yoreh De’ah*, para. 141, he states: “And the fact that it is forbidden to depict a man and a dragon applies expressly when they are shown in full with all their limbs, but a head or a body without a head incurs no prohibition on enjoying it when found, or even when made.”⁷⁸ It is possible that this casual reference to the depiction of “a body without a head” suggests not only that at the beginning of the fourteenth century was it no longer a primary concern, but possibly also that both R. Asher and his son Jacob were by then influenced by the more liberal Sephardi culture, which never gave rise to such distortions resulting from theological convictions as in the Ashkenazi culture.⁷⁹

A detailed study of the distortion of human figures in Ashkenazi illuminated manuscripts has yet to be made. The examples cited here only trace its origins at the beginning of the thirteenth century with the birth of Hebrew illumination in Ashkenaz. This distortion took many forms, from blank or veiled faces to full animal and birds’ heads. It started to decrease at the end of the thirteenth century, although it persisted up to the middle of the fourteenth century in prayer books such as the *Hammelburg Mahzor* of 1348.⁸⁰

70 Urbach, *Tosafists*⁴, p. 206.

71 R. Isaac of Vienna, *Or Zaru’a*, ‘*Avodah Zarah*, para. 203; Urbach, *Tosafists*⁴, p. 206.

72 R. Judah the Pious, *Sefer Hasidim (Das Buch der Frommen)* [Heb.], ed. J. Wistinatzi, Berlin 1891, p. 184, para. 709. I am grateful to Prof. Ivan G. Marcus, who is currently collating the book into English, for his note correcting the misreading of this text.

73 See Avrin, *Micrography*, 1981.

74 *Tosafot* to *Yoma* 54a and b.

75 Based on the *Mekhilta* to Ex. xx:3, end of ch. 10; and on the Babylonian *Talmud*, ‘*Avodah Zarah* 43b.

76 Goldschmidt in Spitzer, *Bird’s Head Haggadah*, pp. 112–113.

77 Jaffé in Spitzer, *Bird’s Head Haggadah*, pp. 79–81; and Narkiss in *ibid.*, p. 109.

78 Urbach, *Codification*, p. 14.

79 Urbach, *Tosafists*⁴, pp. 585–586; and see Moses Maimonides on the subject in his *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer ha-Mada’*, ‘*Avodat Kohanim*, iii:10–11.

80 Darmstadt, Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, MS Or. 13. See Narkiss, *Zoocephalic*, p. 50, Fig. 10.