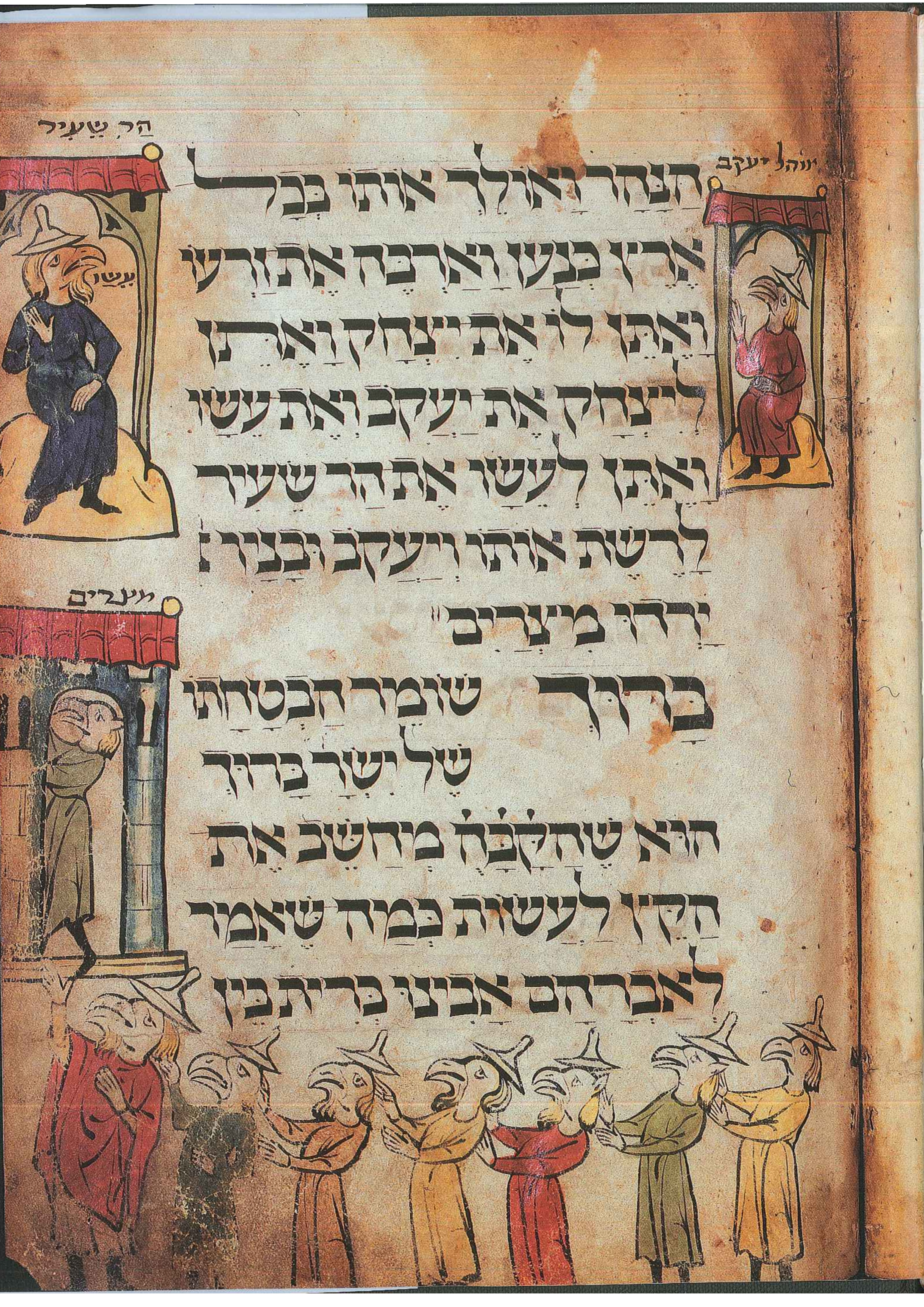
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הר שעיר
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הנהר ואולך אותו בכל
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ואתן לו את יצחק ואתן
ליצחק את יעקב ואת עשו
ואתן לעשו את הר שעיר
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של ישר ברוך
הוא שהקבה מחשב את
הקץ לעשות כמה שאמר
לאברהם אבינו ברית בין

Katrin Kogman-Appel, Sept 2011

# THE MEDIEVAL HAGGADAH

## *Art, Narrative, and Religious Imagination*

Marc Michael Epstein

Yale University Press | New Haven and London

Frontispiece: Bird's Head Haggadah,
fol. 12r (plate 4)

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For Ági

בחירת ליבי
אהבת נפשי
מאור חיי

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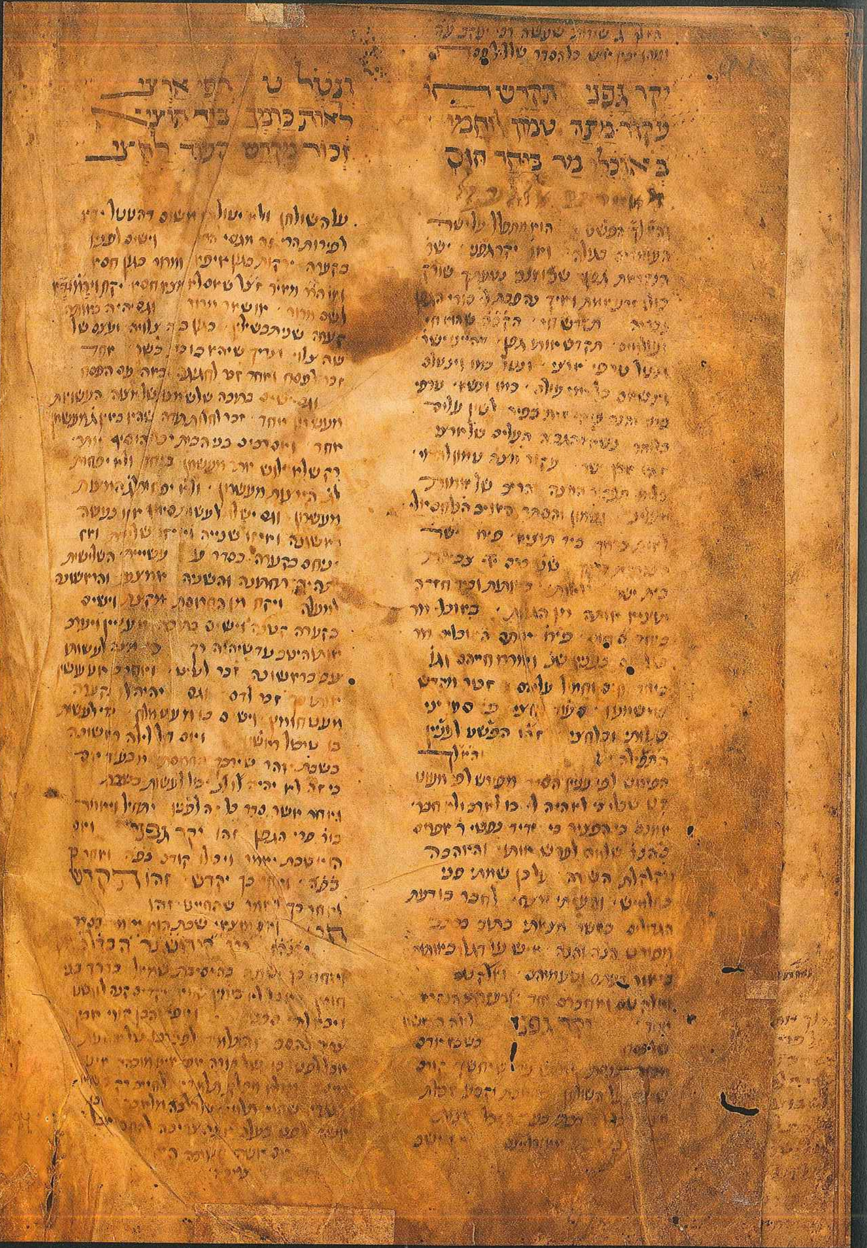


PLATE 25 Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 47v

# 1

# Birds' Head Revisited

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

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

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

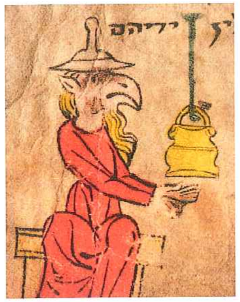


FIGURE 3
"Fully accoutered" male bird-headed figure, with hair, ears, and *Judenhut,* washing his hands. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 5v (detail)

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

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

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

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

My interest in revisiting the issues raised by the Birds' Head Haggadah was, in fact, sparked by its reception by a particular twentieth-century viewer. I had, frankly, considered the manuscript to be a closed book; all that could be written on it had been written. To my mind, it was a simple if somewhat confused work. Though intriguing, the quirks of its iconography had long ago been noted and catalogued, and various solutions to its mysteries proposed. And although new and occasionally irksome interpretations of the birds' heads occasionally arose, how much more was there, really, to add? But in the course of perusing the elegant 1965 facsimile of the manuscript with my then ten-year-old son, Misha, I discovered—through his fresh and art-historically untutored eyes—a number of interesting things about this haggadah that had escaped attention or consideration.

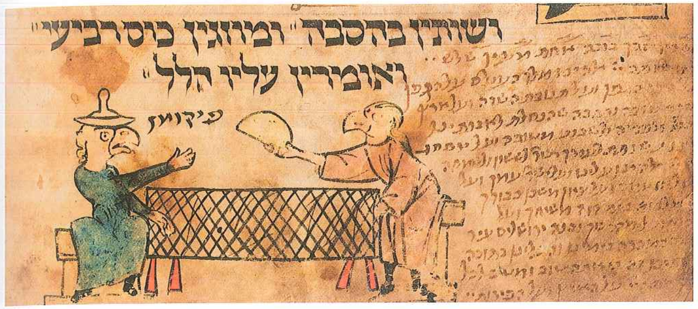

ושותין בהסבה" ומוזגין כוס רביעי"
ואומרין עליו הלל"
פיקומן

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## THE BIRDS' HEADS: THEIR USE AND MEANING

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

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

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

The third trend in interpretation is sociopolitical. Heinrich Strauss resisted predetermining a single explanation for all examples of the zoocephalic phenomenon, particularly a halakhic one, maintaining instead that animal-headed figures in Jewish visual culture emerged from the sociopolitical context of Jewish-Christian relations in the Middle Ages. Because Jews lacked a tradition of depicting human figures, the images were adopted wholesale from stereotypical anti-Jewish depictions of Jews in Christian art. They continued to be troped in an anti-Jewish manner even when they appeared in Jewish manuscripts. Ruth Mellinkoff takes Strauss' problematic argument even further, insisting that the manuscripts were produced by Christian artists who were "anti-semitic" (an anachronistic term with reference to medieval iconography). These artists somehow foisted these representations upon their gullible Jewish patrons. And the patrons, in spite of the blatant negativity of the images and the high prices they presumably paid for the manuscripts, accepted these insulting images without complaint, habituated as they were, according to Mellinkoff, to "looking without seeing" because of the constancy of anti-Jewish imagery around them. Mellinkoff's interpretation is difficult to take seriously; it requires an entire supporting cast of maximally ignorant, minimally oblivious collaborators, making medieval Jews out to be as blind as some Christians alleged them to be.[9]

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

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

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

Following Narkiss, the bird-headed figures are commonly described—in such venues as the Israel Museum's own Web site—as an extreme pietistic measure to avoid the depiction of the human countenance. Perhaps this interpretation was born out of an inability to conceive of such a bizarre and fanciful treatment of the human image as emerging from anywhere other than the twisted and febrile imagination of religious fanatics. Whatever its origin, this view is regrettably persistent, in spite of the fact that Hans Jaffé had, as early as 1967, convincingly argued that the expediency of the birds' heads in fact reflects a liberal halakhic position rather than an extreme one. He demonstrated this by contrasting the strongly aniconic stance of Judah the Pious, the disapproval (without absolute prohibition) of the MaHaRaM, and what might be called the "compromise position" of R. Ephraim of Ratisbon (Regensburg, 1133–1200), who forbade the depiction in visual art of the human face alone. R. Ephraim did not mention replacing human faces with those of birds or animals, but in other responsa he does allow the depiction of birds and animals, particularly if they appear in two dimensions. While it cannot be known whether R. Ephraim would have a priori countenanced the specific solution of the illuminators of this haggadah, his other, relatively lenient, opinions regarding the two-dimensional depiction of animals suggest that he would not have objected to it post facto.[12]

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

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

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

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

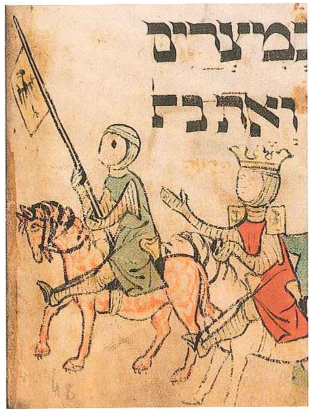


**FIGURE 5**
Blank-faced Pharaoh and his entourage, some with facial features added later. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 24v (detail)

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

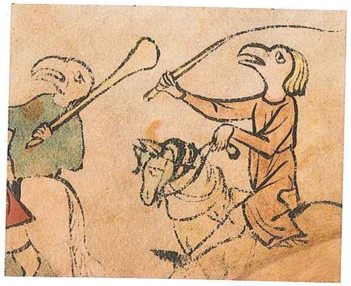


FIGURE 6
Datan and Aviram pursuing the Israelites. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 24v (detail)

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

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

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

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

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

### BEYOND THE HALAKHIC DEFAULT: A HIERARCHY OF CHOSENNESS AND OTHERNESS

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

While replacing the faces of Jews with birds' heads is more halakhically lenient, it also is more nuanced; it has more potential for iconographic richness than does mere erasure. The replacement of human features with those of birds satisfies the halakhah in avoiding the depiction of the human face, but the fascinating variety and individuation in how these figures are illuminated far exceeds the default of erasure. As in the case of the "erased" default, the figure is again human, and again the artists refrain from depicting a human face. But here the similarity ends. Rather than merely leaving the faces blank, they replaced the human head with that of a specific type of bird, represented in a lively variety of ways and in a highly individuated manner, differentiated according to age, sex, and status (plate 19). This variety represents an attempt to go beyond merely satisfying the halakhah, and it far exceeds the default of the featureless face.

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

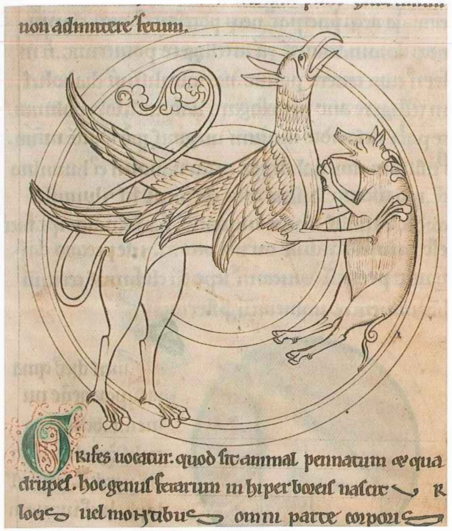
If the choice to thus represent Jews is not merely the default but is intentional and significant, it is reasonable to believe that the type of bird depicted should be of consequence. What kind of bird head is chosen as a substitute for the Jewish face, and what meaning does it have that would compel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

## WHAT KIND OF BIRD?

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

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

The manuscript's subsequent owners clearly accepted the griffin-headed figures as well: they preserved them, rather than effacing or even commenting negatively or in a perplexed manner upon them, even though the book is full of comments on the subjects of the illuminations. However strange they seem to the postmodern eye, it is essential to consider what griffins might have evoked for the authorship of the Birds' Head Haggadah and to try to understand why the griffin, rather than any other animal, was adopted as the creature most emblematic of Jews.



non admittere fetum.

Grifes uocatur. quod ſit animal pennatum et qua-
drupeſ. hoc genuſ ferarum in hiperboreiſ naſcitur R
locis uel montibus omni parte corporis

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

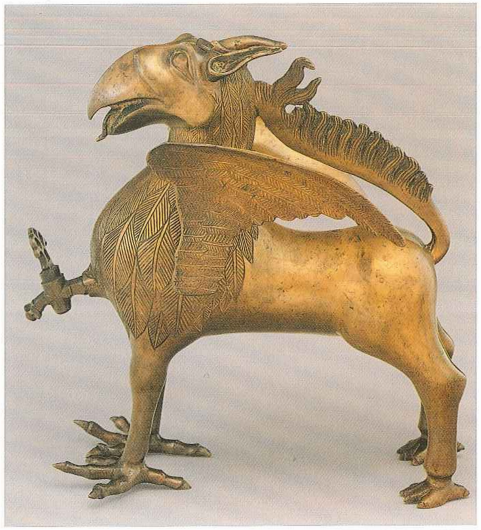


**FIGURE 8**
Griffin. Acquamanile, Germany (Nuremberg), c. 1130. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.1413)

## THE GRIFFIN: A CONSCIOUS CHOICE

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

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

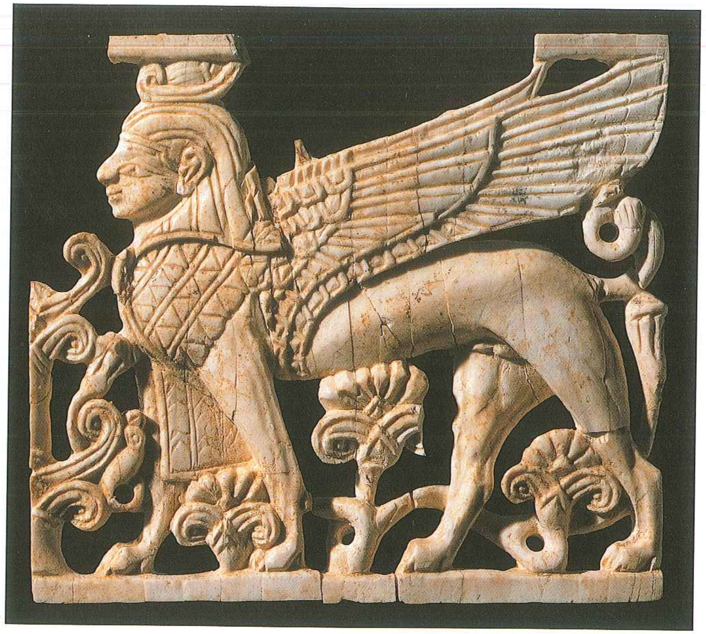


**FIGURE 9**
Winged sphinx/cherub. Ivory plaque, Phoenician, 9th–8th century BCE. Found at Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), northern Iraq. British Museum ANE 134322, Room 57, The Ancient Levant, case 12, no. 5

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

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

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

The figures in the Birds' Head Haggadah, like the griffins in later Jewish visual culture, might be understood to continue the cherubic topos that appeared in the Tabernacle and the Temple. Like the cherubs on the Ark and the curtain of the Holy of Holies, they represent a combination of three of the four creatures of the divine Chariot: lion, eagle, and human. Accordingly, they might be interpreted as emphasizing the connection of Jews with the divine, wherein the Jewish body is equated with the Chariot, an idea present in mystical literature contemporary with the creation of the manuscript (fig. 13).[22]

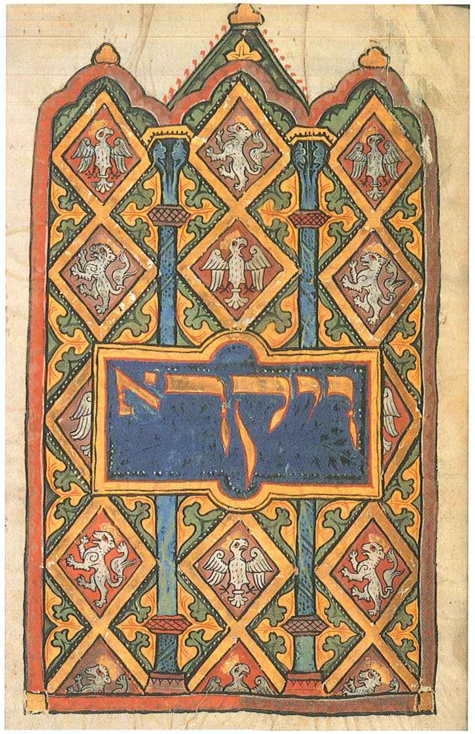


**FIGURE 10**
Lions and eagles alternating on the curtain of the Tabernacle. *Duke of Sussex's German Pentateuch,* fol. 137r

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

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

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

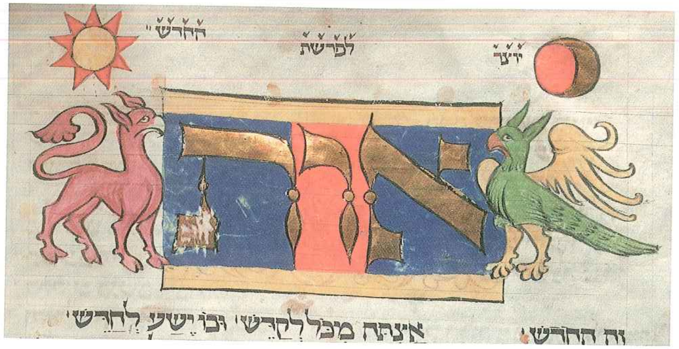


FIGURE 11
Cloven-hoofed, wingless griffin (also called an alce or a keythong in later heraldry) symbolizing the sun, and two-legged dragon (wyvern) symbolizing the moon. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Or. 321, *Laud Maḥzor*, Germany, 1250–1260, fol. 57v (detail)

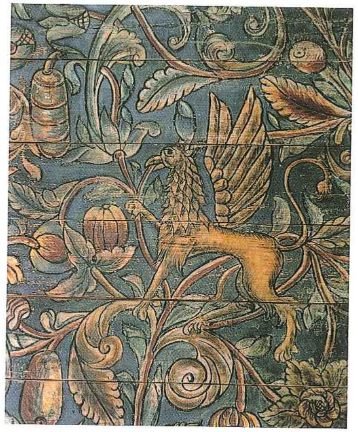


FIGURE 12
Griffin. Eliezer Zusman Katz, Synagogue of Horb, Southern Germany, 1755. Israel Museum

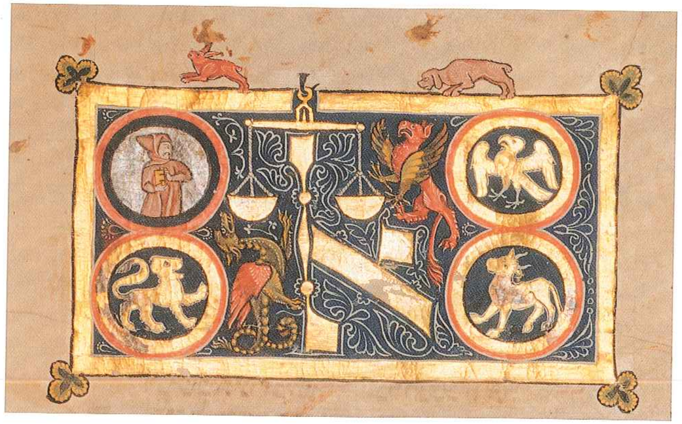


FIGURE 13
The Bearers of the Divine Chariot. Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, MS 1102/I–II, *Leipzig Maḥzor*, Germany, c. 1310–1320, fol. 31v

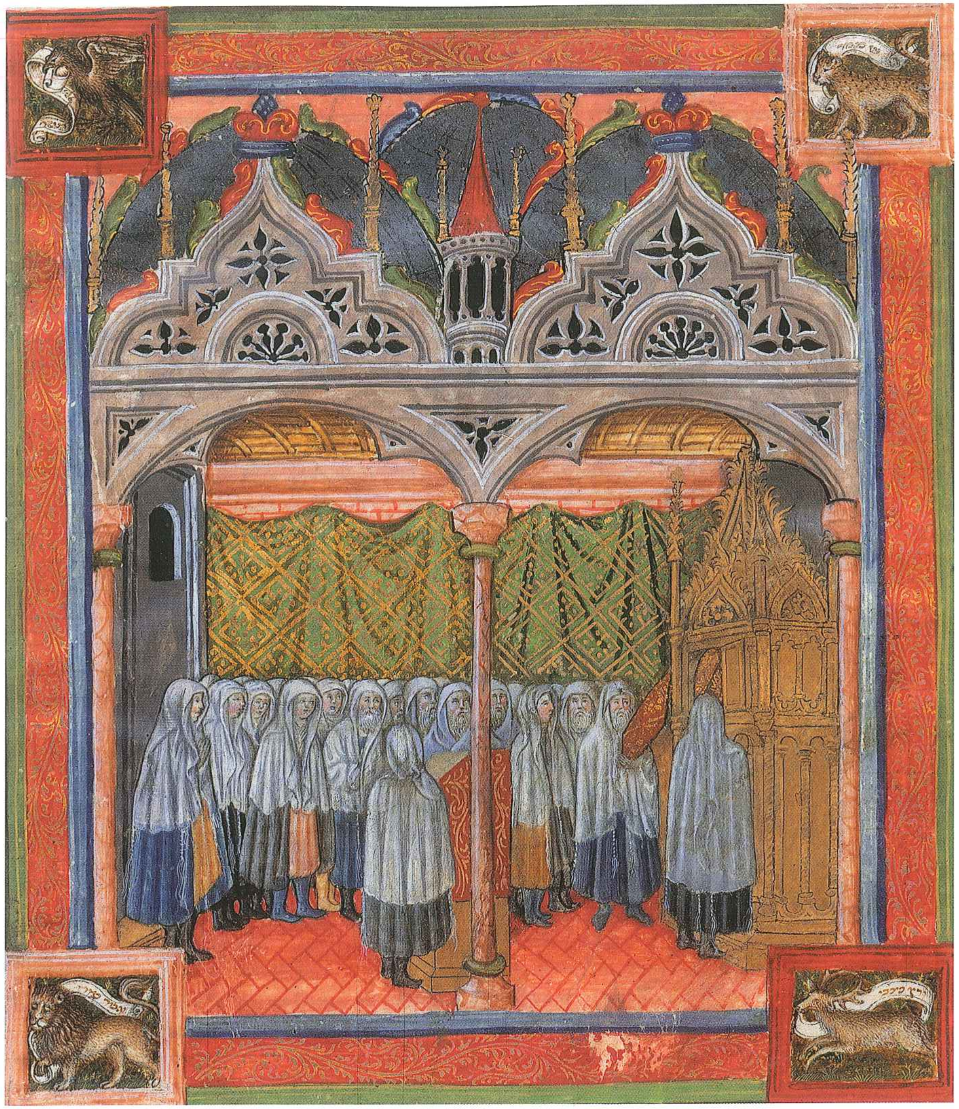


FIGURE 14
Synagogue scene bordered by the four beasts of R. Judah b. Tema, with lion and eagle on the left-hand corners of the frame of the central image. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Codex Rossiana 555, Jacob b. ʾAsher, *ʾArbaʿh Turim*, Italy, 1435, fol. 12v

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

## BLANK FACES: SUBVERTING POWER

If the depiction of Jews with the heads of griffins not only satisfies the prohibition of the representation of the human countenance but also serves to introduce a positive commentary on the spiritual nature and national characteristics of Jews, what, by way of contrast, do the featureless faces have to say about non-Jews? In order to answer this one needs to consider the images of blank-faced non-Jews (Egyptians; plate 15) in relationship with the other examples of featureless figures in the manuscript: those of angels and celestial bodies (figs. 15, 16). Do all three types of featureless images, apparently so different from one another, have anything in common?

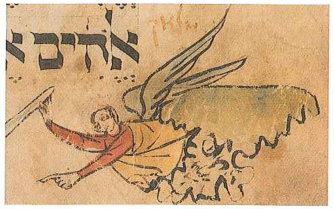


FIGURE 15
Angel calling to Abraham at the binding of Isaac. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 15v (detail)

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

The accentuation of the total dependence of these celestial beings on the will of God is clearly a response to the fact that both angels and the celestial bodies were worshipped as demigods or deities at various points in history, either by the Jews themselves or by their neighbors. The powerful emphasis that rabbinic sources place on their lack of will and autonomous power grows out of the fear that people might idolatrously supplicate or perhaps even venerate them, neglecting the worship of the one God who created them. This fear seems to have been justified: ancient and medieval Jewish magic is, in fact, replete with the invocation of angels and the casting of horoscopes, and rabbinic literature is full of counterspells to limit or break the power of these potential demigods.[26]

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

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

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

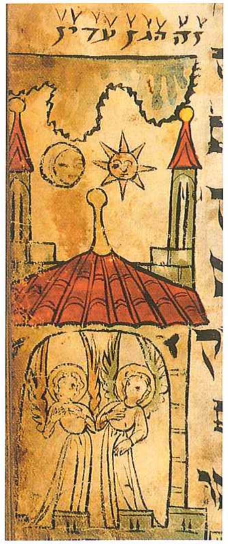


FIGURE 16
The gates of Paradise, with the Patriarchs and blank-faced angels, sun and moon, facial features added later. Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 33r (detail)

To what extent does this characterization reflect the reality of how Jews viewed and behaved toward gentiles in Mainz around 1300? The Birds' Head Haggadah belongs to the realm of the private made manifest: it expresses, via a creative medium, certain sociotheological and historiosophical ideas about non-Jews for the consumption of an individual patron, a particular family, or, at most, a small community. In this context the iconography may do one of two things. It may reflect a xenophobic mindset—a view of Christians as inferior and defective—and a paranoia (based either in rhetoric or experience) that precipitated fearful and disdainful behavior toward them. On the other hand, it may simply "perform" an expected litany, comparable to the sorts of things Christian literature habitually says about "the Jews." Just as Christians could refer liturgically to "*Judaei perfidi*" even as they enjoyed perfectly cordial relations with individual Jews, Jewish iconography may in fact simply reflect one mode in which Jews talked about non-Jews, without predetermining implications for their relationships with particular Christians.

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

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

Although the exact circumstances of the creation of the Birds' Head Haggadah remain indeterminate, the tenor of the Jewish-Christian relationship in Mainz circa 1300 can, perhaps, be glimpsed via recourse to the many instances of legislative pressure and theological polemic of the High Middle Ages, and the repeated occurrences of mob violence in and around Mainz at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries. This history, however, must be considered with a critical eye and—following the work of Nirenberg and Elukin—with the strong caveat that what were recorded were inevitably the dramatic negative interactions. The daily neutral and positive encounters remain relatively unsung. Accordingly throughout the ensuing analysis, I will be careful to insist that the sentiments seemingly conveyed in the iconography of the Birds' Head Haggadah be regarded as rhetorical expressions possessed of a reality in and of themselves—feelings experienced by the manuscript's authorship and understood by its audience. As such, they are worthy of consideration even in the absence of more concrete evidence for the particular historical circumstances that precipitated their expression.

Rees and Borzello 1986. On the New Medievalism, see Brownlee et al. 1991. On the New Philology, see Busby 1993. On the *Annales* school, see Burke 1991; Clark 1999; Dosse 1994. On narratology, see Brilliant 1984, 2000, 2004. For reception theory, see Camille 1989, 1992, 1998. On iconography as "text," see Lewis 1995, 1998. For Koerner's microcontextualism, see Koerner 1997, 2004a, 2004b, 2007.

12 Because, in most cases, it cannot be determined whether the direction for particular details or treatment of iconography came from the patrons, the artists, or—most likely—a collaboration between the two, I will refer throughout this work to the patronage/design/execution of a given manuscript as its "authorship," following a terminology employed for literary works whose construction details are similarly occluded. Compare, for instance, the use of the phrase "authorship of the Zohar" in Liebes 1993, 85–138. Katrin Kogman-Appel prefers "designers" (Kogman-Appel 2006, 12), but I feel that the word "designer," with its often purely visual associations, underplays the great engagement of the authorship with textual ideas.

13 See Suckale 1988. On patron-artist relations in Ashkenaz, see Frojmovic 2008 and Shalev-Eyni 2007.

14 When I examine motifs on Polish synagogue ceilings I am always acutely conscious that even as I interpret a hare hunt as an allegory for the persecution of Israel by the nations, in *that* particular venue, *that* specific hare may have been depicted as being attacked by an eagle for a reason involving contextual realities utterly unknown to me. Perhaps the artist or patron was named Haas (hare) and was involved in a personal conflict with a landlord (*poreẓ/pereẓ* [eagle/vulture]). But I could never confirm or deny such a speculation; the information on which it is based is undocumented and well-nigh unrecoverable except in extraordinary cases.

15 While exact provenance remains unknown, increasingly tighter circles can be drawn on the basis of such elements as the use of midrashic details in the iconography. Compare, for example, Narkiss 1970, Narkiss et al. 1982, 13–15, Batterman 2000 (critiqued by Kogman-Appel 2006, 189), and Kogman-Appel 2006, 212, for a progressive development of understanding in terms of the authorship context of the Spanish haggadot.

16 On narratology, and text as exegesis, see Mitchell 1987 and Bal and Bryson 1991. On medieval and early Renaissance contexts, see Schapiro 1996; Brilliant 1991; Camille 1985a, 1985b; Duggan 1989; Iversen 1990; Kessler 1989; and Lubbock 2006.

17 Verkerk 1999, 71.

18 Ibid., 73.

19 Ibid., 81.

20 Ibid., 73–74.

21 Camille 1989, 162.

22 Jolly 1997, 5.

23 Hahn 1999, 109.

24 Kogman-Appel 2006 demonstrates, *pace* Batterman 2002, that the Sephardic haggadot are nonkabbalistic. The Birds' Head Haggadah displays little that I perceive as kabbalistic (though scholars of kabbalah have yet to consider it and the other Ashkenazic illuminated manuscripts). It seems likely to me that it was created for a patron who probably lived within a moderate pietistic context, possibly someone who supported the aims of the pietists and financed them, though not him or herself a kabbalist.

25 Pamela King (2008) describes "kinetic definitions of the perception process" as "help[ing] to refine further our understanding of how the audience views in the visually rich world of the festive event." King's formulation makes it clear that the most apposite parallels to the enactment of the haggadah at the seder are such publicly performed liturgical pageants and processions.

26 Freedberg 1991, and see Koerner 2004a.

27 *Barait'a de-melekhet ha-mishkan* 14:16–20 further distances the divine voice from the *kruvim,* localizing it "from within" then "from next to" the Incense Altar, and finally "from next to" the Sacrificial Altar. See *Barait'a de-melekhet ha-mishkan* 1992: 219, 244.

28 Epstein 1997, 88.

29 This view is changing in light of new research on the response of Jews to Christian pilgrimage in the Middle Ages; see Shoham-Steiner 2006.

## 1. Birds' Head Revisited

1 There are, in addition, a few other motifs, some implicitly and others explicitly eschatological. In my description and dating of the manuscript I am indebted to Spitzer 1965, particularly the essays by H. L. C. Jaffé and Bezalel Narkiss. For an insightful treatment of the phenomenon of the birds' heads in the sociohistorical context of the manuscript, see Schapiro in Spitzer 1965, 15–19, reprinted as Schapiro 1979a. A more recent publication is the edition published as part of the series comprising the *Index of Jewish Art.* See Narkiss and Sed-Rajna 1976.

2 Ameisenowa 1949; Mynott 2009.

3 On the historical context of medieval Mainz, see Yuval 2006, 104, 130, 132, 144–145, 148, 149 n. 33, 153, 157, 161–162, 171, 172. For material culture and archaeological evidence in Speyer, see Castano et al. 2005, 59–90, 99–105, 124–260. On Jewry law in fourteenth-century Germany, see Lotter 1989. On the Jews' status as "slaves" in the sense of Roman law, see Lotter 2002, 292, and Linder 2002, 1997, 1987.

Jaffé's enumeration and delineation of the illuminations in Spitzer 1965, 31–88, is primarily descriptive—it is left to Narkiss to analyze iconographic significance, and thus it is he who expresses consternation at the inconsistencies of the illumination (Spitzer 1965, 90–94ff.).

Two important recent studies of the "afterlife" of iconic images and what scholarship on them says about the scholars themselves are Camille 2009 and Steinberg 2001.

4 A *genizah* is a room, usually in a synagogue, where old manuscripts that are no longer usable, but which contain the divine name in Hebrew, are stored to await burial. Once something goes into the *genizah* it is not seen again (unless the *genizah* is unearthed in an archaeological investigation).

5 The tendency has been to conclude that the viewers of the manuscript who authored these annotations "interpret the pictures wrongly" (Spitzer 1965, 27, 34, 40, 94). If this is the case, then the captions and annotations are not valuable for those who are searching to reconstruct the conception as it originated in the minds of the authorship. But if one is interested in the manuscript's reception by its various audiences over time, attention to the captions and annotations is essential.

An interesting example of an annotation that affords a glimpse into the way the manuscript was used at least at some points in its history is a marginal interpolation in the *kiddush* on folio 2v. *Kiddush* is the prayer of sanctification for the three Pilgrimage Festivals in which the body text is consistent with only the appellations of the holidays changing. The later annotator has added the words *Ḥag Ha-Sukkot*—Festival of *Sukkot.* Although these words were unnoted by Goldschmidt in his article about textual variants in the manuscript (Spitzer 1965, 112), through them one can reconstruct a receptive context for the manuscript and observe it, as it were, in use. Though it goes without saying that for its earliest users the manuscript was more a utilitarian haggadah than an "art treasure," the annotation makes it clear that for at least one of its users it wasn't even primarily a haggadah but perhaps the only volume of liturgical text in the household. Thus, while it may be technically correct that the manuscript was "designed for use at a single feast only" (Spitzer 1965, 93), it seems that the owners would have pressed it into service for recitation of kiddush not only on Passover but during Sukkot as well. They may very well have made use of it in other ways and at other times. Perhaps it is necessary to rethink the whole idea of what manuscripts were "designed for" if they were actually *used* for purposes other than their obvious primary function. When a Passover haggadah was the only manuscript one owned, one might have deployed it in a variety of circumstances.

6 For a list of the major Ashkenazic Jewish manuscripts that distort the human countenance in various ways (among them zoocephalic and avicephalic distortion), see Mellinkoff 1999, 59.

7 Ameisenowa 1949.

8 H. C. L. Jaffé, "The Illustrations," Spitzer 1965, 31–88; Meyer Schapiro, "Introduction," Spitzer 1965, 15–19; Narkiss 1983.

9 Strauss 1972, 58–61; Mellinkoff 1999. And see my review: Epstein 2002.

10 See Spitzer 1965, 35, 38, 43, 108. On 71, the issue is explored a bit more deeply.

11 Exod. 20:4; Deut. 5:8.

12 http://www.imj.org.il/eng/judaica/birdshead_Haggadah.html; Judah b. Samuel 1924: para. 1625; MaHaRaM, see *Tosafot* on BT *Yom'a* 54b; R. Ephraim's responsum is quoted within the responsum of R. Meir of Rothenberg. Meir b. Barukh 2003, 2: nos. 56, 50. See Spitzer 1965, 66–72.

13 Jaffé, in Spitzer 1965, 38; Mellinkoff 1999, 20, 25.

14 Schapiro, in Spitzer 1965, 17.

15 Roth 1969, 82–83; Schapiro, in Spitzer 1965, 17–18.

16 The idea that Datan and Aviram remained in Egypt is found in *Targum Yerushalmi* on Exod. 14:3, and it is made more explicit in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.* The source of this midrashic detail is likely *Midrash Sekhel Tov;* see also *Maḥzor Vitry*, 1889, 22. Datan and Aviram were characters who underwent a considerable odyssey in rabbinic literature; see L. Ginzberg et al. 2003, 488 n. 75. They would have been familiar to medieval Jews as the archetypal evil traitors via the text of the oath "according to the Jewish custom" (*more judaico*). See Marcus 1938, 49–50. In this oath, the punishment of Datan and Aviram is one of permanent separation from the community, an idea that seems to be contravened on halakhic grounds by the authorship of the Birds' Head Haggadah when it grants the pair features that link them with the other Jews in the manuscript in spite of their turning away from the community.

17 On the pigs' ears, see Mellinkoff 1999, 35. The ears are arguably as leonine as they are porcine, and they certainly conform to the appearance of the ears of griffins in medieval bestiaries. For comparison, see, in particular, the griffin that grasps a pig in its claws in Cambridge, University Library, MS Ii. 4.26, Bestiary, England, 1200–1210, fol. 6v (fig. 7), and note that the griffin's ears, though shaped somewhat similarly to those of the pig, are longer and narrower, and that the entire profile of

the griffin is very similar to those of the Jews in the Birds' Head Haggadah. Other roughly contemporary examples of griffins include the following in the central medieval display of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London: a reliquary made in Cologne c. 1180 (inv. 7650–1861), a Venetian textile imported to Germany between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries (inv. 1293–1864), and a gaming piece of ivory from Cologne, 1150–1175 (inv. 376–1871). Several depictions of the Senmurv, a Persian griffin, appear on import textiles from antiquity through the fourteenth century, occasioning comment in the exhibition text: "common on Sassanian and Byzantine textiles imported into Northwest Europe" (inv. 8579–1863, inv. 8579–1863).

Depictions of griffins in bestiaries also roughly contemporary with the Birds' Head Haggadah include London, British Library, Add. MS 24686, Alphonso Psalter, England, 1284, fol. 18r; London, British Library, Add. MS 42130, Lutterell Psalter, England (Lincoln), c. 1325–1335, fol. 160v; British Library, Harley MS 4751, Bestiary, England (Salisbury?), c. 1230–1240, fol. 7v; Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, MS Gl. kgl. S. 1633 4°, Bestiary of Ann Walsh, England, fifteenth century, fol. 8r; the Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS KB, 128 C 4, *Le Livre fleurissant en fleurs,* Enghien, 1512, fol. 91r; the Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS KB, 72 A 23, *Liber Floridus,* Lille and Ninove, 1460, fol. 46r; the Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS KB, 76 E 4, *Der Naturen Bloeme,* Flanders or Utrecht, c. 1450–1500, fol. 48v; the Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS KB, KA 16, *Der Naturen Bloeme,* Flanders, c. 1350, fol. 87r; and the Hague, Museum Meermanno, MS MMW, 10 B 25, Bestiary, France, c. 1450, fol. 5r. See also the misericords in Cartmel Priory, Cartmel England, late fourteenth century, and in Limerick Cathedral (St. Mary's), Limerick, Ireland, late fifteenth century (Bond 1910, 60–61).

Mellinkoff asserts that the profile is always a sign of infamy (Mellinkoff 1999, 19–21), which is arguable in the case of humans. But animals in medieval art are commonly represented in profile, and heraldic beasts, such as griffins, invariably so. Thus, while human heads in profile may carry negative symbolic valence, even "good" animals, the symbols of the Evangelists or the Lamb of God, are often represented in profile, and the commonplace in depiction may trump the negative valence of profilic representation.

18 See the sarcophagus of Caelia Omnina from a Jewish catacomb in Rome (Leon 1952).

19 Most sources indicate that the Ark (with its cover and the *kruvim*) was looted from Jersualem before the building of the second Temple. See I Kings 14:25–26, 2 Chronicles 12:2–4, 9 (Shishak's sack of the Temple); 2 Kings 25:13–15 and 2 Chronicles 36:17–19 (Nebuchadnezzar's sack). See also 4 Ezra 10:19–22. In 2 Maccabees 2:4–6, Jeremiah is told to hide the Ark in a cave in Mount Nebo. 2 Baruch 6:5–9 describes an angel coming down from heaven into the Holy of Holies and taking the "mercy seat." When the Temple is rebuilt after the Babylonian Exile, the inventory of restored vessels in Ezra 1:9–11 lists 5,400 items, but the Ark is not mentioned. Josephus's description of Herod's augmented and expanded Temple includes no mention of the Ark, only an empty Holy of Holies (*Jewish War,* 5:5; Thackery 1957, 267). On God's voice speaking from between the *kruvim,* see Exod. 25:22.

Textual evidence for the idea that the *kruvim* had leonine bodies is slim. Ezek. 41:18–19 describes the *kruvim* as having two "faces" (*shna'im panim,* two faces, aspects, or sides), that of a human and that of a lion; see Albright 1961. But rabbinic (and later mystical) sources describe the faces and the embrace of the *kruvim* as human, cf. BT *Yom'a* 54a. Cultic images of the *kruvim* are mentioned in Exod. 25:19 and 37:8; 1 Kings 6:25–26; Ezek. 41:18; and 2 Chr. 3:11–12. The rabbinic idea that the *kruvim* on the *kapporet* had human faces seems to be derived from post facto Aramaic etymology. "R. 'Abbahu said: '[A *kruv* is thus named because it] resembles an infant [Aramaic: *ke-rabi'a*—"like an infant"], for in Babylon an infant is called '*rabi'a*'" (BT, *Sukkah* 5b). Rashi (R. Solomon b. Isaac, Troyes, France, 1040–1105, on Exod. 25:18) and Maimonides (*Guide* 3: 1) have assimilated this model, as their description of child-faced *kruvim* correlates with R. 'Abbahu's.

20 On the Tabernacle curtain, see JT *Shekalim* 8:3, where R. Judah and R. Neḥemiah disagree with regard to the meaning of two weaving techniques, *ma'aseh rokem* and *ma'aseh ḥoshev,* employed on the Tabernacle and Temple curtain: "[R. Judah] said: *ma'aseh rokem* means a lion on one side and a lion on the other; *ma'aseh ḥoshev* means a lion on one side and an empty space on the other. [R. Neḥemiah] said: *ma'aseh rokem* means a lion on one side and empty space on the other." Rashi agrees with R. Neḥemiah in his commentary on Exodus 26:1, but he understands the obverse of the curtain not to have contained an empty space but an eagle: "One face on one side and one face on the other, a lion on one side and an eagle on the other." Yaniv 1999 opines that this is the reason for the use of griffins on Torah Ark valences in the early modern period, but the association of lions/eagles/griffins/*kruvim* goes much farther back in time, to Byzantine-era synagogue mosaics, *pace* Sukenik 1932, 22–26, and to the gold glass of the Roman

period (see Barag 1973, pls. 1, 2, 4, 10). London, British Library, MS 15282, Duke of Sussex's German Pentateuch. Pentateuch with Megillot, southern Germany, c. 1300, fol. 137r (fig. 10), contemporary with our manuscript, depicts crowned lions and eagles (not melded as griffins) decorating what I believe to be the Tabernacle curtain as it appears on the page introducing the book of Leviticus.

In later Jewish iconography it retains its ancient association with the sun (see Goldman 1960) and is depicted in parallel with the sun in illuminated *maḥzorim,* as, for instance, when a cloven-hoofed, wingless griffin (also called an alce or a keythongand in later heraldry) accompanies the initial word for the *piyyut 'Ot Zeh Ha-Ḥodesh* (The sign of this month), for *Shabbat Ha-Ḥodesh* in the *Laud Maḥzor* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Or. 321, Germany, 1250–1260, fol. 57v, fig. 11); see Shalev-Eyni 1998. Later, it appears on the ceiling or flanking the eastern oculus (which represented the sun) in European synagogues. See, for instance, the synagogue of Horb, southern Germany, painted in 1755 by Eliezer Zusman Katz and now in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, and that of Sandomierz (Poland, nineteenth-twentieth centuries, fig. 12), among very many other examples. On lions/eagles/griffins/*kruvim* in European synagogue accoutrements, see Yaniv 1999. Some late manuscripts of *Perek Shirah* include the depiction of a griffin accompanying the text of the song of the *zarzir,* more likely a sparrow or starling, and in one case (*zarzir matna'im*) possibly a greyhound or other canine. On the text and history of *Perek Shirah,* see *Perek Shirah* 1966. In all cases, the form and physical situation of these beasts is heraldic, but their function can vary from decorative to symbolic to allegorical. If they appear in connection with an eastern oculus, their symbolic valence is clear. When they illustrate a text that is intended to describe the manner in which "everything that has breath praises God" (Ps. 150) they may be viewed as allegorical. When they appear on synagogue ceilings or in the margins of manuscripts with other flora and fauna they may be decorative, but they may also bear symbolic or allegorical meanings that cannot readily be determined.

21 Oxen were represented in the First Temple in the form of "Solomon's Sea," a great bronze construction consisting of a basin borne on the backs of twelve oxen (1 Kings 7:44). This feature was conspicuously absent in the Second Temple, perhaps because the Jews felt the burden of their sins as a result of their experience during the Babylonian exile—"Because of our sins we were exiled from our Land" (Festival Liturgy, *Mussaf;* see Frenkel and Goldschmidt 1992, 203)—and did not wish to be reminded of the Golden Calf. For the most comprehensive study of the bearers of the Divine Chariot, see Halperin 1988.

22 The literature of *Ḥassidei 'Ashkenaz* is replete with microcosm/macrocosm correspondence (*kol mah she-bar'a ba'olam bar'a ba-'adam*) deriving mainly from midrash and commentaries on *Sefer Yeẓirah.* See Judah b. Samuel 2006, notes 538–540. In *Zohar Va-'etḥanan* 262b Rabbi Simeon b. Lakish makes the equivalence between the figures bearing the Chariot and the patriarchs: the man being Abraham; the lion, Isaac; the ox, Jacob; and the eagle King David.

23 For the eagle as an imperial symbol, see plate 15, fig. 5, and Schapiro in Spitzer 1965, 17.

24 On the eagle as representing divine protection and salvation, see Deut. 32:11, evoking Exod. 19:4. On the eagle as a metaphor for renewal, see Isa. 40:31. The lion is the biblical metaphor of choice for Judah, the leader of the tribes; cf. Gen. 49:9. Rashi writes that "the Community of Israel is likened to a lioness" (Rashi on BT *Sotah* 11b). In rabbinic literature, Israel's assiduousness at prayer is compared to the "lightness" of an eagle and the "boldness" of the lion. See *Mishnah 'Avot* 5:20, paraphrased by Jacob b. Asher (Spain, c. 1270–1343) as the opening rubric for his *'Arba'ah Turim (Tur),* the great code of Jewish law. Joseph Karo (Toledo, 1488–Safed, 1575) maintains and elaborates upon this rubric in the opening lines of his *Shulḥan 'Arukh,* the classic sixteenth-century abbreviation of the *Tur* (Karo 1884, 2). For lions and eagles representing the martyred Jews of Mainz, see Rosenfeld 1965, 133.

25 On the contingency of angels, see Braude 1968, *Pisk'a* 40, 702. See also, for example, Abraham 'Ibn 'Ezra (Spain, 1092 or 1093–1167) on Ps. 119:89–96. On their ephemeral nature, see *Genesis Rabbah* 78:1. On their ability to perform only a single task at a time, see Rashi on Gen. 18:2, quoting *Genesis Rabbah* 40:2b. On the unvarying application of the celestial bodies to their specific tasks in the divine *oiconome,* see "Blessing of the New Moon" (*Siddur,* Ashkenazic 2009, 716).

26 The fear of the veneration of celestial forces is based on the more primal fear inherent in any prohibition of "idolatry": the fear that angelic and planetary power may somehow challenge or threaten divine power; see Epstein 1997, 70–95. On angelology and astrology in medieval Jewish culture, see D. Schwartz 1999. See also Trachtenberg 1939, Swartz 1996, and the more popular Shir 1998. On the nullification of idolatrous images, see *Mishnah 'Avodah Zarah* 4 and BT *'Avodah Zarah* 52b–53b; and Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah,* Laws of Idolatry, chap. 8, secs. 8 and 10.

27 BT *'Avodah Zarah* 53a.

28 Goldschmidt 1969, 122.

29 Jer. 10:25, as included in the text of *Shfokh Ḥamatkhah* (Birds' Head Haggadah, fol. 30r). Goldschmidt 1969, 130.

30 Goldschmidt 1969, 131. See also the magical use of Exod. 15:16 in recombination in the "Blessing of the New Moon" (*Siddur*, Ashkenazic 2009, 716).

Although the classical rabbinic designation of non-Jews as *'ovdei 'avodah zarah* (idolaters) would not at first glance seem to be significantly mitigated by the eventual use of the acronym *'AKuM* as a euphemism replacing it—the worship of celestial bodies being no better than the worship of idols—in fact, medieval Jews did not believe that Christians literally worshipped the sun, moon, and stars. The eventual use of the acronym *'AKuM* appears in writing relatively late, in the works of the ReMA (Rabbi Moses Isserles, Poland, 1530–1572), but it was likely in oral circulation before that time. It should not be understood as an indictment of non-Jews for outright idolatry, but rather for believing in the power of fate rather than trusting in divine providence. This represents an intermediate stance between rabbinic conceptualization of non-Jews as idolaters and the eventual designation of them as "people bounded by the ways of religion" by R. Menahem b. Solomon HaMeiri (Provence, 1249–1315) in his commentary *Beit Ha-Beḥirah*. See R. Menahem b. Solomon Meiri 1944, 26a; 1961, 37b; 1943, 62b, among many other loci.

31 On effacement as iconoclasm in late medieval (and postmodern) culture, see Groebner 2008. On image "erasure" in Protestantism, see Koerner 2004b.

32 Goldschmidt 1969, 120.

## 2. Socioreligious Stratification

1 Lateran IV's imposition of distinguishing "Jewish" marks makes sense in the context of the golden locks of all the Jewish figures shown with hair in the manuscript. Even in these depictions of Jews intended for internal consumption, and even when they are given a set of features that marks them as definitively different, a desire to represent the essential physical commonality of Jews with the majority population continues to be troped in the blondness of their hair.

2 One servant is represented with a closely fitted cap (folio 7v), but none is equipped with a *Judenhut*. The servant with the cap has a ducklike bill in place of the standard eagle beak, perhaps a comment on the fact that this servant, though a Jew, is "domestic" (like a duck), rather than free (like an eagle).

A third group of bareheaded figures appears bearing unbaked maẓah dough on poles (plate 16). These were identified as women by Jaffé and Narkiss (Spitzer 1965, 39), presumably on the basis of their hatlessness, but it also may have had to do with the fact that women are distinctly shown in the next scene, which depicts contemporary maẓah baking (plates 17, 18). However, although these ostensible women do wear the hat typical of males in the manuscript, they also lack the head coverings common to all the other women in this work, and at least one figure, shown in the center, is depicted with a shock of blond hair at the back of the head. No woman is shown with exposed hair in the manuscript.

Since the figures number six and are led by Moses, they may be a short-hand depiction of the six hundred thousand who left Egypt in Exod. 12:37, in the same way that the six figures depicted descending into Egypt are intended to represent the totality of the Israelites (twelve tribes, even though Joseph is already in Egypt; plate 4). Perhaps their hatlessness is meant to signify that they are young people, the figures being a play on the words *bnei Yisra'el*, the "children" of Israel. But if so, why are they depicted bareheaded here, and not, for instance, in the scene of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds (plate 11)?

It is more likely that this illumination is based on Onkelos's paraphrase of Exod. 14:8, "And the Children of Israel went out with a high hand," where he translates *yad ramah* ("with a high hand") as *be-resh galut'a* ("with bare heads"), reflecting a Greco-Roman cultural climate in which freemen went bareheaded (which, in turn, is echoed in the more contemporary gesture of taking one's hat off and waving it in the air as a sign of rejoicing in one's freedom). See London, British Library, Add. MS 27210, Catalonia, 1320–1330, fol. 14v (plate 39, top left). If this is the case, there is an interesting contrast between the illumination on this page and the one on the facing page, which depicts the bareheaded Datan and Aviram (figs. 6, 22; plate 15). Among the Israelites here, bareheadedness (as opposed to the depiction of their labors as slaves [plate 6]) signifies freedom, and is only momentary; by the next scene, they have regained their hats, whereas in the case of Datan and Aviram, bareheadedness signifies that they have gone over to an alien culture.

3 On the *Judenhut* as a sign of infamy, see Mellinkoff 1993, 1999, and Shreckenberg 1996, passim. See Jesus' *Judenhut* in the depiction of the Supper at Emmaus (Lk. 24:13–32) in the so-called St. Louis Psalter (Leiden, University Library, B.P.L. MS 76A, north English, 1190–1200, fol. 27) as shown in Blumenkranz 1966, 77, pl. 98. For other examples of Jesus wearing a Jewish hat, see Schreckenberg 1996, 141–143, Bachmann 2003, Stephani 2005.

4 Lateran IV, 1215: Canon 68 ("On Jews"). See Schroeder 1937, 78–127. The best recent discussion of and summary of the literature concerning the *Judenhut* is Lipton 1999, 15–19 and notes. See also N. Roth 2002, 173–174. For examples in art, see Mellinkoff 1993, 57–94, relevant plates and passim.

5 Spitzer 1965, 49–57, esp. 54–55.

6 The freshly liberated Israelites, as noted, are another example (plate 16). But they are a special case, and their hatlessness (a result of application to a grammatical comment on the text of Exod. 14:8) responds to a *topos* of freedom rather than one of marginality.

7 Gen. 40:15, 42:7.

8 For contemporary *realia* that often entered written medieval biblical commentary, see RaShI on Gen. 1:1, wherein he seeks to reassure Jews that the outcome of Christian-Muslim conflict over the Holy Land was immaterial to their own religionational aspirations. See also Walfish, 1993.

9 Joseph's beatification most famously resets on his resisting the overtures of Potiphar's wife. See Kasher 1927, "*Va-Yeshev*," 1489–1490; compare *Quran* 12:23–29 and *Pesikt'a DeRav Kahanah*, S3 (Braude and Kapstein 2002, 635).

One would think that such a righteous man would be concerned with preserving his identity as an Israelite, even in service to Pharaoh. But in the text (Gen. 41:42–43, 45), Joseph seems to rather willingly accommodate himself to the honors Pharaoh bestows upon him, all designed to obviate his Israelite identity in one way or another. Pharaoh changes Joseph's clothing and its ornamentation, gives him a royal means of transportation, and makes a public proclamation regarding his status (compare Est. 6:8–9, and the case of Mordekhai). But he also changes Joseph's name and gives him a (non-Israelite) wife.

*Leviticus Rabbah* 32:5 asserts: "R. Ḥuna said in the name of R. Kappar'a: Because of four things were the Jewish people redeemed from Egypt: They did not change their names, they did not change their language, they did not speak badly of one another, and there was not found among them an individual who engaged in sexual immorality." How does Joseph fare by this standard? He had already brought bad reports of his brothers to their father (Gen. 37:2), certainly a violation of the idea that the Israelites did not speak badly of one another. When he acquiesces to Pharaoh changing his name, when he clearly speaks Egyptian (Gen. 42:23), and when he takes a foreign wife—the ultimate sexual temptation and transgression in the Patriarchal family (Gen. 28:1, 6) in the desert wanderings of the Israelites (Num. 25), after the Conquest (Judg. 14:3), and in exile (Ezra 10:1–4)—he completes the quadrivium of sins said to impede redemption.

Contrascripturally, exegetical literature bends over backward as it stretches to preserve Joseph's righteousness. Two examples will suffice: biblical commentators are about equally divided on whether the name given Joseph by Pharaoh, "Ẓaphnat-p'ane'aḥ" in Gen. 41:45 is a Hebrew or an Egyptian one. Advocates of a Hebrew origin include the *Targumim* (Aramaic paraphrases and translations); among the medievals, RaShI, Naḥmanides (R. Moses b. Naḥman, Catalonia, Spain, 1194–c. 1270), and Ibn Kaspi (Joseph b. Abba Mari b. Joseph b. Jacob Caspi, Provence, 1297–1340). Rashbam (Samuel b. Meir, France, c. 1085–c. 1158), Bekhor Shor (Joseph b. Isaac Bekhor Shor of Orleans, twelfth century), and Abarbanel (Isaac b. Judah Abarbanel, Spain, 1437–1508) see it as Egyptian. Both contentions can be brought to bolster the idea of Joseph's righteousness. If it is an Egyptian name, then it was given by divine providence and served to conceal Joseph's identity from his brothers. If it were Hebrew, then (according to the Naḥmanides) it would signal Joseph's acceptance as *karov le-malkhut*, in spite of his Israelite origins. The *Da'at Zekeinim Mi-Ba'alei Tosafot* (a collection of tosafist exegesis in the order of the Pentateuch) on this verse reads the name as an acronym and makes Joseph come out looking golden in the process: "Ẓaddik *P*itpeit *N*egged *T*a'avato—*P*otiphar *'I*na *N*afsho *Ḥ*inam"—a righteous person struggles against his desires; Potiphar afflicted him causelessly. *Ba'al Ha-Turim* sees the name as numerically equivalent to "*megaleh nistarim*"; revealer of secrets (when the word *nistarim* is written *ḥasser*—that is, without a *vav*). Whatever the case, it is in no commentator's eyes a simple assimilation of a foreign name as it seems to be in the text.

What about Joseph's foreign wife? Again, the commentators indulge in unprecedented gymnastics: if Potiphar and Poti-phera are one and the same, and if the reference to this man as a *sariss* (eunuch) suggests castration or impotence (rather than "servant" or "courtier"), Asenath must be adopted. But who is she? She is the daughter of Joseph's sister Dina, conceived when she was raped by Shekhem, and somehow having found her way to Egypt where she was adopted by Potiphar/Poti-phera. So, rather than being foreign, she is as associated with family as she can be. See Charlesworth 1985. For further literary analysis, see Kugel 1994. For Sephardic expansions, see McGaha 1997.

10 Though it is found in contemporary sources (cf. Rashi on BT *Ḥullin*, 92a), I use the term *karov/krovim le-malkhut* tentatively, as one would have to know more regarding the specific situation in