

Animal Attraction

Hidden Polemics in Biblical Animal Illuminations of the *Michael Mahzor**

Abstract

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The *Michael Mahzor*, produced in Germany in 1258, one of the earliest illuminated *Mahzorim*, is a two-volume prayer book containing liturgical poems for the Holy Days and the ‘four special Sabbaths,’ when liturgical additions are made to the regular weekly chapter reading during the month of Adar. The manuscript is copiously illuminated, with animals adorning the opening words of the liturgical poem, and contains a militant iconographical plan, including knights and fighting warriors. The relationship between text and image in illuminated manuscripts is important, because they need to be ‘read’ together in order to understand the illuminations in their immediate and general context. The novelty of this study is in a holistic reappraisal of the manner in which we think about illustration in connection with text. This paper addresses three scenes containing animals in the *Michael Mahzor*: *El Mitnase*, Mich. 617, f. 4v; *Zakhor*, Mich. 617, f. 11r; and *Kol Nidrei*, Mich. 627, f. 48r. The first two examples discussed here are the illumination of *El Mitnase* for *Shabbat Shekalim*, the Sabbath beginning the month of Adar and the *piyyut* for the pericope *Zakhor* for the Sabbath that immediately precedes Purim, which is celebrated on the fourteenth of Adar. The third is the liturgical formula *Kol Nidrei* for *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. The article suggests that the animals in the last two scenes represent the four kingdoms mentioned in chapters seven and eight of the *Book of Daniel*. Jewish exegesis commonly interpreted these beasts as symbols of four historical kingdoms. In addition, aspects of animal symbolism in the illuminations – such as hunted and hunting animals – should be considered in the context of medieval Jewish-Christian polemics. By examining the scenes together, we can speculate as to the greater plan the patron might have had in mind when ordering this manuscript. The article seeks to understand how the Jewish patrons envisioned themselves and their neighbors, through a prism of images, *piyyutim*, and the writings of Hasidei Ashkenaz.

1. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Mich. 617; 627. Neubauer, No. 1033. Both volumes of the manuscript are available online.

2. Jewish Figural art was abandoned around the mid-sixth century and reemerged in book illuminations around 1230 in German lands. On this issue see Kogman-Appel, “Christianity.”

The *Michael Mahzor*,¹ produced in Germany in 1258, one of the earliest illuminated *Mahzorim*,² is a two-volume prayer book containing liturgical poems for the Holidays and the ‘four special Sabbaths,’ when liturgical additions are made to the regular weekly chapter reading during the month of Adar. The four special portions of the Torah are *Shekalim*, *Zakhor*, *Parah*, and *ha-Hodesh*. The name of the

scribe, Judah bar Samuel ‘Zaltman,’ is inscribed in the colophon of the second volume, MS. Mich. 627, f. 174, alongside the date of production. The manuscript is copiously illuminated, with animals adorning the opening words of the liturgical poem, and a militant iconographical plan, including knights and fighting warriors. Normally, only the first *piyyut* (liturgical poem) of a given holiday or Shabbat is illuminated, and it is this single poem that is adduced in the scholarship concerning the image. However, it is my contention that because the illumination is related to the entire holiday, it should be understood together, not only with the text it adorns, but with *piyyut* commentaries and rabbinical literature related to the *piyyut* in question.³ The relationship between text and image in illuminated manuscripts is important, because they need to be ‘read’ together in order to understand the illuminations in their immediate and general context. The novelty of this study is in a holistic reappraisal of the manner in which we think about illustration in connection with text. I am interested in understanding how the Jewish patrons envisioned themselves and their neighbors, through a prism of images, *piyyutim*, and the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.

In this paper I would like to address three scenes containing animals in the *Michael Mahzor: El Mitnase*, Mich. 617, f. 4v (figure 1); *Zakhor*, Mich. 617, f. 11r (figure 2); and *Kol Nidrei*, Mich. 627, f. 48r (figure 3). The first two examples discussed here are the illumination of *El Mitnase* for *Shabbat Shekalim*, the Sabbath beginning the month of Adar and the *piyyut* for the pericope *Zakhor* for the Sabbath that immediately precedes Purim, which is celebrated on the fourteenth of Adar. The third is the liturgical formula *Kol Nidrei* for *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. I suggest that the animals in the last two scenes represent the four kingdoms mentioned in chapters seven and eight of the Book of Daniel. Jewish exegesis commonly interpreted these beasts as symbols of four historical kingdoms.⁴ According to the *Midrash va-Yikra’ Rabba* 13.5:

Fear refers to Edom, on account of the following verse: “And this I saw, a fourth beast, fearful, and terrible” (Dan. 7.7) [...] Daniel foresaw what the evil kingdoms would do [to Israel] [...] “The first was like a lion” (Dan. 7.3). This refers to Babylonia [...] Then he went and saw it as an eagle [...] “And behold, another beast, a second one like a bear” (Dan. 7.5). This refers to Media [...] “Another, like a leopard” (Dan. 7.6) [...] This refers to Greece [...] “And behold, a fourth beast,

3. Kogman-Appell, *A Mahzor from Worms*, 1–35; Shalev-Eyni, “The aural-Visual” 189–204; Sed-Rajna. On the types of *piyyutim* in Ashkenaz see Fleischer, *Hebrew Liturgical Poetry* 442–66.

4. For research of Jewish sources representing the four beasts as the four kingdoms see Chazan; Raviv; Rowland.

terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong” (Dan. 7:7) [...] This refers to Edom [...] “[t]he pig” (Deut. 14:7) [...] Why is [Rome] compared to a pig? It is to teach you the following: Just as when a pig crouches and produces its hooves, it is as if to say, “See how I am clean [since I have cloven hoof],” so this evil kingdom acts arrogantly, seized by violence, and steals, and then gives the appearance of establishing a tribunal for justice. (Neusner 299–301)

In addition, aspects of animal symbolism in the illuminations – such as hunted and hunting animals – should be considered in the context of medieval Jewish-Christian polemics. By examining the scenes together, we can speculate as to the greater plan the patron might have had in mind when ordering this manuscript.

With the exception of some works by Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, there has been little scholarship focused on the *Michael Mahzor*.⁵ Recent studies on the manuscript were undertaken by Eva Frojmovic, who posited a Christian illuminator (Frojmovic 45–46), and Sarit Shale-Eyni, who relates discusses the role of illuminated animals as a tool for visual reminder for the reader on a given *piyyut* (Shalev-Eyni, “Between Interpretation”). According to Shalev-Eyni, the beasts are copied from Christian manuscripts, such as the *Necrologus* from the twelfth century.⁶ Another important source of knowledge about the animal world and its portrayal are the *Bestiaries*; in many Hebrew manuscripts we find that the animals resemble portrayals in contemporary bestiaries, which were used as models.⁷ In many Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, the iconography and style of the images are closely related to Christian art, but only in rare cases can we actually discern whether the work was produced by a Jewish illuminator or a Christian one. I do not suggest that the illuminations of the *Michael Mahzor* were necessarily created by a Jewish illuminator. Rather, I would maintain that the patron or a person acting on the patron’s behalf (such as the scribe, for example) directed the artist’s design and illustration of the scenes.

In a recent article, Katrin Kogman-Appel discusses methodological aspects of what she refers to as the “the three-way relationship” among patrons, artists, and viewers, as well as the hierarchy between the textual and the visual in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts (Kogman-Appel, “Pictorial Messages”). She analyzes terms which describe that relationship, for example the term “authorship” proposed by Marc Michael Epstein,⁸ and settles on the term “de-

5. Sed-Rajna 13–14, 63–64. Narkiss 43–44 mentions this *Mahzor* in the *Hebrew edition of his book* (first published in English, 1969).

6. Hauptstaatsarchiv, Klosterliteralien Obermünster 1, Dieses Nekrolog (herausgegeben M. G. Necrol. IH, 334); München, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, ms. 1. Boeckler 54–59. On example books see Alexander; Lowden and Bovey; Scheller.

7. On bestiaries see Barber; Baxter; Hassig. See also *The Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages*.

8. Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah* 6: “A collaboration between Jewish patrons who sponsored and conceptualized the manuscript (in some cases, it seems, with the aid of rabbinic advisers), and artists (Jewish or non-Jewish) who executed the commission. [...] First, in the planning of each manuscript, the authorship emphasized (either subtly or explicitly) those aspects of the narrative that highlight the agenda it wished to convey, clothing these ideas in visual language. Then, these concepts were transmitted through the interpretation of their commission by the designers and executors of each work. Ultimately, the images and their motivating ideas were received and reinterpreted by the various audiences of each manuscript over time.”

Figure 1. *El Mitnase*: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Mich. 617, f. 4v.



Figure 2. *Zakhor*: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Mich. 617, f. 11r.



Figure 3. *Kol Nidrei*: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Mich. 627, f. 48r.



9. Kogman-Appel 12: “By designers I mean the people who were responsible for the subject matter, the contents and messages conveyed in the cycles. [...] In referring to the designers of the cycles, I thus mean the persons who stood behind them intellectually, whereas by artists I mean the craftsmen engaged in the actual drawing and painting of the miniatures. This does not mean, however, that the two functions did not overlap in some cases.”

10. We should mention two other main esoteric traditions in Ashkenaz: “Special Cherub,” active in northern France between the end of the Twelfth century and the beginning of thirteenth century; and Rabbi Nehemiah ben Shlomo Troestlin, the Prophet from Erfurt, active in the first third of the thirteenth century. According to the distinction made by Idel, esp. 73.

11. For a study on the Leipzig *Mahzor*, produced in Worms around 1310 and based on R. Eleazar’s writings, see Kogman-Appel, *A Mahzor from Worms*, which offers an interdisciplinary study of the manuscript’s illuminations, the community’s rituals, and their close relation to the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.

12. Hollender, “Narrative Exegesis” esp. 430. On *piyyut* commentary see Hollender, *Clavis Commentariorum* 1–20; Hollender, *Piyyut Commentary*.

13. On another thirteenth century manuscript illuminated based on the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* and *piyyut* commentaries see: Offenberg, *Illuminated Piety*.

14. On the associative nature of the writings in Ashkenaz, see Soloveitchik, esp. 462–63. More on the issue of the urtext see Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts* 486–500. On *Hasidei Ashkenaz*’s unsystematic way of writing see Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His Wonders* 16–18.

signers,” which she employed in a previous study of Haggadot from Spain.⁹ After analyzing the iconography, and at times new portrayals, not based on Christian iconography, we turn to the meaning of the scene displayed. Images are not merely illustrations of the texts, but rather, they extend the meaning of the text; moreover, images unpack or divulge latent traditions of the culture not articulated in discursive text. A major factor in terms of the patron’s intention and the artist’s implementation of the manuscript’s texts and illustrations is whether they were intended for communal use in the synagogue or for private use. When an idea appears in an illuminated manuscript, particularly one used by the whole community (e.g., *the Mahzor* in our case or the giant Ashkenazic Masoretic Bible), it attests to the concepts contained within, which were considered acceptable in a public forum, even if the idea was not necessarily understood by all.

Some of the concepts displayed in the *Michael Mahzor*’s illuminations seem to parallel concepts in the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, the German Pietists, a pietistic movement active in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Germany. The trend is associated with the Qalonymus family,¹⁰ especially Rabbi Judah the Pious (d. 1217) and his student, Rabbi Elazar of Worms (d. c. 1230);¹¹ to them we should add two figures: Rabbi Eleazar ben Moshe the preacher, grandson of Rabbi Judah the Pious, who wrote a commentary on Exodus (to be discussed later) and Rabbi Abraham ben Azriel of Bohemia (a student of R. Elazar of Worms), the author of *Arugat ha-Bosem*, a collection of commentaries on *piyyutim* and *selihot*, written c. 1234 (Bar Azriel). According to Elisabeth Hollender, the need for *piyyut* commentary emerged from the difficulty to understand words and phrases in the *piyyutim*. Via their interpretations, the commentators elevated the status of *piyyut* as a central part of the synagogue service. In most cases we know the name of the *payyetanim*, but there are few *piyyut* commentaries where the author’s name can be identified, so they remain anonymous.¹² In this regard, Rabbi Abraham ben Azriel is exceptional. Of course, this does not mean that all *piyyut* commentaries written in Ashkenaz are necessarily related to *Hasidei Ashkenaz*. That said, our manuscript relates to both *piyyut* commentaries and biblical commentaries influenced by writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.¹³ Here we should note the nature of medieval scriptural interpretation of this sort: the commentator can jump from one issue to another merely because of a small – and not necessarily because of a prominent – connection between them.¹⁴

I will now associate displays of biblical animals with commentaries, by first discussing each illumination separately and then connecting them all together.

El Mitnase, Mich. 617, f. 4v

The *piyyut* ‘*El Mitnase*’ for tractate *Shekalim*, based on Exodus 30.11–16, describes the raising of money (*shekalim*) for building the desert tabernacle. This *piyyut* is the first one illustrated in most Ashkenazi *Mahzorim*, as the volume opening with the four special Sabbaths was regarded as the first.¹⁵ The text of the *piyyut* is decorated with a rectangular frame, while the initial panel of *El Mitnase* contains an unusual upside-down scene on a yellow and blue background. When inverted, the panel portrays a hunt scene. On the right, an archer dressed in green wears a great helm, kneels, and draws his bow. In front of him, two dogs are chasing a deer. On the left, a warrior dressed in red holds a round shield and brandishes a sword that seems to have blood on it. Below this scene two pairs of peacocks are facing each other. Above the scene, inside the letter *taf*, a red fox stands on its hind legs.

15. On this see Fleischer “Prayer and Piyyut” 1: 36–78.

Figure 1, a detail.



According to Eva Frojmovic, the inversion here is the result of the fact that the illustration is the work of a non-Jewish artist who could not read Hebrew, and therefore has inverted the scene. She suggests that

not only could the painter not read the text, but he was unfamiliar with the appearance of the Hebrew alphabet [...] the painter sought to right the unnatural order – as he saw it – by standing the page upside down before painting it [...] the error occurs only once in the entire *Mahzor*. It seems that Judah bar Samuel ‘Zaltman’ then took control and supervised the illuminator more closely. (Frojmovic 49–51)

However, the lower end of the frame remains unfinished, and even if the artist had no idea how the Hebrew script was read, he certainly must have had a notion of the orientation of the page, judging by the design of the frame. I therefore suggest that the scene was inverted intentionally, and not due to a lack of understanding.¹⁶ Furthermore, in another illumination in this *Mahzor*, several pages after our folio, on f. 16r (figure 4), we find an illustration of the *piyyut* for Purim “Va’ye’ehav Oman Yetomat Hegan” (“The Nurse Cared for the Orphan of the Garden”) (Davidson 197; Sed-Rajna 23–24). It depicts the tree on which Haman and his sons are hanged, arranged horizontally.¹⁷ These figures are part of this panel’s decoration, and here there can be no doubt regarding the intention of the artist to display them in such a manner. Thus, it stands to reason that the artist was consciously playing with the directionality with the upside-down illumination to the *El Mitnase piyyut*.

In fact, the inverted illustration of the *El Mitnase* scene can be explained based upon the context in which it appears in the *Mahzor*. *El Mitnase* is recited on the first Sabbath morning of the month of Adar. Purim, the climax of the Adar prayers and festivities, is celebrated on the fourteenth of the month. This month contains or is proximate to the “four special Sabbaths,” when four different additions are made to the regular weekly chapter reading. As mentioned, the four special portions of the Torah are entitled *Shekalim* (Exod. 30.11–16), *Zakhor* (Deut. 25.17–19), *Parah* (Num. 19.1–22), and *Shabbat ha-Hodesh* (Exod. 12.1–20). I suggest that the upside-down scene alludes to Esther 9.1: “it [the decree of genocide against the Jews] was reversed.” These words appear at the end of the verse:

16. This does not mean that it was made necessarily by a Jewish illuminator, but only that the patron or a person acting on his behalf (such as the scribe, as Frojmovic suggests) ordered the artist to design and illustrate the scene in this manner.

17. The faces of Haman and his sons are covered with helmets, although they are not engaged in battle. This is in accordance with most of the manuscripts illuminated in Ashkenaz during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, where the human faces are mostly replaced by zoocephalic portrayal. For more on this phenomenon in the most recent study see Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah* 48–61. On Haman’s tree in Ashkenazi *Mahzorim* see Kogman-Appel, “The Tree of Death.”

18. A hunting scene appears in other illuminations for this *piyyut* in Ashkenazi manuscripts, such as the *Laud Mahzor*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Laud Or. 321, fol. 38a, probably written in Franconia around 1240–60. The image depicted on the arch portrays, from left to right, four men and two dogs chasing a deer and a hare, and the other is from the *Leipzig Mahzor*, where a hound dog on the right is sniffing after a hare that is running free on the left. The *Leipzig Mahzor* was studied by Katrin Kogman-Appel (“The Scales”), who demonstrated that along with ideas of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, there are also messianic notions in this *piyyut*’s illumination.

19. See also Ayali; Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion*; Horowitz, “Odd Couples;” Offenberg, “Expressions of Meeting,” chap. 4; Offenberg, “Illuminations of *Kol Nidrei*.”

20. Black and white dogs that represent the friars are seen in Andrea di Bonaiuto’s representation of the Dominican friars as Dalmatian dogs in the fresco *Allegory of the Triumphant Church and the Dominican Order* in the Spanish Chapel at the Santa Maria Novella in Florence, painted in 1365–67: cf. Nirit Ben-Aryeh. See also Stow 137–44. Kurt Schubert (251–54) has demonstrated that the same dogs may also symbolize the Dominican friars or Christians in general in the Sephardic *Rylands Haggadah*, Manchester, John Rylands University Library, MS. Ryl. Hebr. 6, fol. 29, representing the Christian persecutor of the Jews.

21. According to Gerson Cohen (esp. 29), this tradition is traced back to Rabbi Akiba (cf. *Genesis Rabba* 65.21). According to Cohen, the medieval Jews believed that “Esau might exchange his eagle for a cross, but he was Esau nonetheless.” See also Yuval, *Two Nations*.

Talmud makes a clear connection between tractate *Shekalim* and Haman. It explains that the reason for tractate *Shekalim* being at the beginning of the month of *Adar* is because of the money Haman would later pay for Israel, and thus Israel redeemed themselves by paying in advance half a *shekel* for the Temple. Hence, we may approach this illumination as encoding the larger meaning of the month of *Adar*.

A hunting scene illuminates the *piyyut* in the *Michael Mahzor*,¹⁸ and as Kurt Schubert and numerous other scholars of Jewish art have demonstrated, hunting scenes are common in Jewish illuminated manuscripts.¹⁹ They are understood as allegories for the Jew, usually represented as a hare or a deer, being persecuted by Christians, depicted as a hunter and his dogs. In Christian art, white dogs with black spots often represent the Dominican friars, who are also known as “Dogs of the Lord” (*domini canes*).²⁰ The dog is associated with the image of the hunter, especially the biblical hunter Esau, who had long symbolized the Christians in Jewish art and culture. In medieval rabbinical language, Esau, the forefather of Edom, symbolized the Roman Empire and ‘Christianity,’ which had been considered a direct successor of the Roman Empire ever since the fourth century.²¹ The portrayal of the hunter is associated with each of the four Kingdoms that enslaved Israel – Babylon, Medea, Greece, and Edom – in *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, Toledot, 65:

“Now then take your weapons, your quiver, and your bow and go out to the field” (Gen. 27.3): “Weapons” refers to Babylonia [...] “Your quiver” speaks of Medea, as it says, “So they suspended Haman on the gallows” (Est. 7.10). “And your bow” addresses Greece: “For I bend Judah for me, I fill the bow with Ephraim and I will story up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece” (Zech. 9.13). “And go out to the field” means Edom: “Unto the land of Seir, the field of Edom” (Gen. 32.4). (Neusner 2: 389)

This *midrash* links Esau the hunter, Haman, and two more items that appear in our scene: a bow and a sword. The verse mentioned here (Zech. 9.13): “When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man,” also relates to the *piyyut* via the verse that precedes it (Zech. 9.12): “Return to *Bizzaron* [stronghold], you prisoners of hope.” One of the *piyyut*’s last verses reads: “Always *Bizzaron* will be for the Rose of Sharon.” While the

term *bizzaron* is based on the Biblical verse, the Rose of Sharon stands for the people of Israel, as mentioned in *Midrash Song of Songs Rabbah* 2.1. The context of this verse in the *piyyut* is that the people of Israel will always have hope and a stronghold for redemption. By keeping the Law and paying the monetary tithes for the Temple, the people of Israel redeem themselves and will be saved from their enemies.

Ephraim and Judah, mentioned in the quoted sources, hint at the Jewish tradition of the two saviors. The first is sometimes referred to as the son of Joseph, and sometimes, more specifically, as the son of Ephraim, while the second is the son of David, from the tribe of Judah (Babylonian Talmud, *Sukkah* 52a). The Anti-Messiah, generally called the Antichrist but referred to in Jewish literature as Armilus, stands opposed to them. According to this tradition, at the End of Days there will be a war between the nations led by the Anti-Messiah and between the People of Israel, who will be led by the two Messiahs (Yehudah, Jellinek 2: 54–57; Berger; Biale). This tradition already appears in the ancient *midrash*, in the *Book of Zerubavel* (Dan; Himmelfarb; Lévi; Patai), and in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century writings of the Tosafists in France and Germany. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the idea of two Messiahs was widespread. There seems to be an increase in interest in the two Messiahs and Armilus in the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, for example, in the book *Arugat Habosem*. References and extensive commentaries on this Messianic narrative remain unpublished in manuscripts, such as the commentaries on the Bible of R. Elazar ben Moshe the preacher in München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 221,²² and his commentary on Exodus in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. 202,²³ where the two saviors call for revenge against the Gentiles. The concept may thus have been familiar to the readers of the *Michael Mahzor*, and the figures of the armed men could be understood as each symbolizing a Messiah: son of Joseph and son of David.

We mentioned that each of the warriors is wearing a great helm, a technology invented around 1220, which was more protective than the helmets used previously. This helmet has a flat top and surrounds the entire head, thus protecting the warrior's face (DeVries 70–73). Jews were clearly intimately aware of their surrounding material cultures,²⁴ and this development in military technology was such a breakthrough that a brief time after its development, it was prominently illuminated in both volumes of the *Michael Mahzor*. As shown by the studies of Israel Jacob Yuval (“Jewish Messianic Expecta-

22. On this manuscript, see Abrams, “A Commentary to the *Sefer Yetsirah*” and “*Sefer Ha-Yehud*”.

23. Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew*, Nr. 945. I am currently working on its publication.

24. On the importance of material culture in the study of the Middle Ages see Lipton.

25. Yuval, “Jewish Messianic Expectations;” and *Two Nations*, 33–49, 92–106, 173–74.

tions;” *Two Nations*, chap. 6), Ephraim Kanarfogel (Kanarfogel, “Medieval Rabbinic Conceptions”), and others, messianic expectations reached a climax around the year 1240, and along with historical events such as the Crusades and the Mongol threat, are recorded in the literature, drama, and art of the period. Yuval demonstrated in his study that messianic aspirations in Ashkenaz carried expectations of vengeance against the Gentiles.²⁵ Elliot S. Horowitz (*Reckless Rites*; “The Rite to Be Reckless”) analyzed connections between the celebration of *Purim* and violence against Christians among some Ashkenazi Jews. The sword in our image has blood on it, and this may refer to the verses (Isa. 34.5–6): “For my sword shall be drunk in the sky; Lo, it shall come down upon Edom, upon the people I have doomed to wreak judgment; The LORD has a sword it is sated with blood [...] for the LORD holds a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom.” This source was interpreted as referring to Christians, the putative inheritors of the title “Edom.” In the context outlined by Yuval and Horowitz, this small detail seems particularly relevant.

I suggested above that the inverted scene represents the biblical verse from Esther 9.1. This verse speaks not only of salvation, but also of vengeance and domination of enemies. The verses from Zechariah and the warriors in the image represent the forthcoming battle. This image not only portrays the contemporary situation of the Jews being ‘hunted,’ but also shows an upside-down world (*inversus mundi*) with an inversion of power structures. This is a well-known motif in medieval art and literature. It appears in various marginal illuminations that often display animals.²⁶ The upside-down world portrays the imagined alternative reality of the Jewish patron, in which the Jews hold power over their current enemies. The opening verse of the *piyyut El Mitnase* is based on Chronicles 29.11: “To you Lord belong kingship and pre-eminence above all.” Rabbi Elazar of Worms (1176–1238) wrote a commentary on the *Siddur*, where he explains this verse in terms of vengeance against the Gentiles (Rokeach sign. 130, 753). This inverse world then, may serve as a reflection of the intellectual atmosphere in Ashkenaz during the first half of the thirteenth century.²⁷ So far, we have noticed that the *piyyut* and the scene point to an anticipated shift in status of the Ashkenazic Jews.

The hunt scene represents the status of Israel in the present day, as the Jews are being persecuted by the Christians. In this illumination, the hunted animal is a deer (male), as opposed to other images that portray a hind (female). Both the deer and the hind represent

26. On the upside-down world in Jewish art see U. Schubert. For more on the characters of animals and the upside-down world see Kunzle; Sprunger. For more on *inversus mundi* see Jones. On marginalia see Camille; Randell; Sandler.

27. For more on the issue of the intellectual atmosphere see Kanarfogel, *The Intellectual*, esp. chaps. 3–4.

Israel, but in this image, the portrayal of a male deer seems intentional. The deer represents not only the people of Israel, but also the land of Israel (*Erez HaZevi*, see below). The Seventh Crusade, which lasted six years, ended four years before the production of this manuscript, and at the time this manuscript was produced, the Land of Israel was a pilgrimage destination for Jews, whether as part of their messianic aspirations or because of a lull in crusade warfare (Elchanan). Kogman-Appel has demonstrated that the *El Mitnase* hunt scene in the *Leipzig Mahzor* relates to messianic concepts: “This variation of the hunting motif thus presents an earlier stage, one in which the preconditions for the arrival of the Messiah are about to be fulfilled” (Kogman-Appel, “The Scales” 310). We can also understand the image in the *Michael Mahzor* in this way.

If we look above the hunting scene, inside the letter *taf*, we will notice a fox. Rachel Wischnitzer concluded that the portrayal of a fox in illuminated Hebrew manuscripts represents messianic aspirations, based on a *midrash* describing the encounter of Rabbi Aqiba and his companions with a fox (cfr. Wischnitzer). As is described in the Babylonian Talmud, *Makkot* 24b:

When they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox emerge from the house of the Holy of Holies. They began to cry, but R. Aqiba brightened up. They said to him, “Why so cheerful?” He said to them, “Why so gloomy?” R. Aqiba explained to them that now that the harsh prophecy of Uriah is fulfilled: “Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field” (Mic. 3.12), therefore the optimistic prophecy of Zechariah will be fulfilled: “Thus says the Lord of hosts, there shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem” (Zech. 8.4).

The fox in our image may represent the fox walking on the Temple Mount, as a reflection of contemporary misery, based on Lamentations 5.18: “Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.” Just as the hunt scene describes the Christian persecution, the fox represents the ruins of Jerusalem; beyond that, it may reflect the fulfillment of the prophecies of Uriah and Zechariah, and the future redemption. Furthermore, we should remember that the *piyyut* describes the raising of funds (*shekalim*) for the building of the desert tabernacle, as well as a half *shekel* for the Temple.

28. A further connection to salvation motifs may be found in the portrayal of the peacocks at the lower margins of the scene. For Jewish examples, Dalia-Ruth Halperin has shown that depictions of peacocks represent the notion of salvation. Since ancient times, the peacock usually appears near the Tree of Life, and thus is connected with notions of afterlife: Halperin 240, 277–81. The *Michael Mahzor* is suffused with these birds, in various scenes, and here the peacocks may represent another aspect of the messianic aspiration.

29. For more on illuminations of ‘Jewish knights’ see Offenberg, “Jacob the Knight.”

Thus, the *piyyut*’s Temple context suggests that the fox here deserves consideration in light of the messianic narrative.²⁸

This image may hint that the exceptional reversal which occurred historically only on *Purim* in the present world will become the norm in the Messianic era. The ‘Jewish knight’ can be seen as a symbol of messianic yearning among thirteenth-century Ashkenazic Jews. In recent years, the imagined identity of Jews who portrayed themselves as knights has received scholarly attention, most recently and notably from Ivan G. Marcus, who focuses mostly on written sources. He discusses the dissonance between actual Christian knights in the Middle Ages, whom he identifies with the Crusaders, and the fact that some Jews saw themselves as knights. According to Marcus, “the Jewish writers portray Jews as knights of the God of Israel in contrast to the Christian knights and rabble, who travel toward a worthless goal” (“Why Is this Knight Different?” 148).²⁹ In his discussion of passages from *Sefer Hasidim*, Marcus contends that the Jewish sage appreciated the positive value of the knightly code of honor and of valorous behavior, implying that the Jewish Pietist should also serve the Lord fearlessly without expecting any reward (151–52). Knights in Jewish texts suggest spiritual aspects of noble warriors, qualities that reveal a heroic nature.

The image of ‘Jewish Knights’ in medieval Jewish art continues a midrashic theme of the reversal of tragedy through redemption. Salvation is viewed in terms of a biblical verse (Esth. 9.1) speaking of a reversal which implies that when the Messiah will come, he will gather the people of Israel, ascend the mountain of Zion, and the Temple will be rebuilt. This process originates in the celebration of the month of *Adar* that commemorates the great salvation in which the people of Israel faced tremendous danger but emerged victorious. This reversal is represented in the statement that “it was reversed, and the Jews got their enemies in their power” (Esth. 9.1). The scene in the *Michael Mahzor* portrays both the current state of the Jews in Ashkenaz, as they are persecuted by the Christians, demonstrated by the hunt scene, and the upcoming salvation as demonstrated by the warriors. Now let us turn to hybrid warriors.

Zakhor, Mich. 617, f. 11r

The second of the four special Sabbath Torah readings is the one before *Purim*, known as *Zakhor* (meaning: ‘remember’). It deals with

30. On hybrids and transformation from human to bestial form in medieval Ashkenazi literature and especially related to *Hasidei Ashkenaz* see Rotman 136–88; Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His Wonders* 131–60.

Israel's obligation to remember Amalek's wickedness in the desert and its need to extirpate his seed. The illumination for pericope *Zakhor* fits inside a rectangular frame, with the initial word written on a blue and pink background surrounded by both beasts and hybrids.³⁰ On the right, it features a hybrid with a human body dressed in white and a bear's face brandishing a sword and holding a long spear. In front of him, a leopard faces another hybrid on the left, dressed in green with a human body and a wolf's face, stretching a bow and arrow. At bottom right, we find an eagle, and on the left two warriors clashing their swords and holding small round shields. The one on the left has a bird's face and the figure on the right is wearing a helmet of the great helm type. Gabrielle Sed-Rejna identified these beasts as hinting at the four kingdoms. I would like to explore this concept further, especially the beast illuminated only in this scene and, as opposed to the other beasts, not in any other scene of either volume of the *Michael Mahzor*: the wolf.

In Esther Rabbah 10:13 we encounter the concept of the four kingdoms in relation to Esther and Mordechai. Because Haman descends from Amalek, he is described as a wolf, like the rulers of Media and Persia:

“For I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek” (Ex. 17.14): blotting out in this world, I will blot out in the next. “The remembrance of (zeker) Amalek,” this refers to Haman, the passage having been [erroneously] read, “The males of (zekar) Amalek.” The patriarch Jacob also hinted at all this in the blessing of the tribes, as it says, “Benjamin is a wolf that raveneth; in the morning he devoureth the prey” (Gen. 49.27): this refers to Saul who was the morning of Israel, being the first of the kings, and who was from the tribe of Benjamin and smote Amalek and spoiled all their possessions. “And at even he divideth the spoil” (*ibid.*): this refers to Mordechai and Esther, who championed Israel in their exile, which is like the shadows of evening and divided the spoil of Haman, who is compared to a wolf. For God raised him up to oppose the wolf, namely, the kings of Media and Persia, who are compared to a wolf, as it is written, “And behold another beast, a second, like to a wolf” (Dan. 7.5). In Babylon, however, they say: This refers to the kings of Media and Persia who eat like a bear and are restless like a bear and are shaggy like a bear. God raised up them to confront Morde-

chai and Esther from the tribe of Benjamin, who is called “A wolf that raveneth.” (Freedman and Simon 239–40)

Benjamin and his descendent Mordechai are compared to a wolf in order to oppose Haman. Portrayals of Benjamin as a wolf were thoroughly examined by David Shyovitz, who demonstrates how *Hasid-ei Ashkenaz* understood that werewolves take on an entirely bestial form, not merely a hybrid one. He elaborates on the thirteenth-century French biblical commentary of Rabbi Ephraim b. Samson on Genesis 49, and the blessing to Benjamin:³¹

Benjamin was a ravenous wolf, who would occasionally maul people – and when the time came for him to turn into a wolf, as it says, “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf” (Gen. 49.27), if he was with his father he would lean on the doctor, and in that merit would not turn into a wolf. Thus it says, “and if he leaves his father he will die” (Gen. 44.22) – that is to say, if he separates from his father he will turn into a wolf [and attack] people on the way, and anyone who encounters him will kill him.³²

A similar passage is found in Rabbi Elazar the Preacher’s commentary on Exodus 30.11–13:³³ “When you take a census of the Israelite people according to their enrollment, each shall pay the Lord a ransom for himself on being enrolled, that no plague may come upon them through their being enrolled. This is what everyone who is interested in the records shall pay: a half-shekel by the sanctuary weight – twenty gerahs to the shekel – a half-shekel as an offering to the Lord.” Rabbi Elazar’s commentary associates the wolf with Mordechai, paying the half shekel, and the hanging of Haman. I suggest that the portrayal of the wolf in the illumination was also inspired by this line of Ashkenazic thought. Perhaps that is the reason why it bears a different weapon, i.e. a bow and arrow, as opposed to the other fighting figures that each wield a sword. Now, let us turn to a scene that portrays the four animals/kingdoms as beasts alone, without any human figures.

Kol Nidrei, Mich. 627, f. 48r

The initial word *Kol* (‘all’) is inhabited with animals twisting around

31. Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His Wonders* 134–44; Shyovitz, “Christians and Jews”. On Rashbam’s commentary on Exod. 8.17 and the connection between werewolves and Arov see Liss 239–40.

32. London, British Library, MS Or. 10855, published as *Perush Rabeinu Ephraim b. R. Shimshon u-Gedolei Ashkenaz ha-Kadmonim al ha-Torah*, ed. Yo’el Klugman (Jerusalem, 1992). I used Shyovitz’s translation (“Christians and Jews” 529).

33. Oxford, BL, Opp. 202, fol. 234a
שלא יהיה בהם נגף בימי המן לכך יקראו
שקליהם: ד“א יהי“ה בה“ם נג“ף המ“ן:
איש כפר נפ‘. שיתנו צדקה לפני ראש השנה
ולפני יום הכפ‘ ליי‘ בפקד אתם. כשהקב“ה
פוקדם ונם קרין לפניהם בסקירה אחת
ועוברים לפניו כבני מרון. נגף בפקד אותם
זה. זא“ב בנימן זאב יטרף זה מרדכי. וקדמו
שקליהם לשקלי המן: ... מחצית בשקל לפי
שנ‘ כופר נפשו והשקל הוא כופר נפש.
שק“ל בגי‘ נפ“ש: מחצית השק“ל. תרומה.
תל“ה. בזכות זה תלה את המן.

a thin, winding branch. Progressing from right to left, following the Hebrew text, we find a lion, an eagle (standing in the same position as the one illuminating *Zakhor*), a deer, and an ibex; at the bottom appears a bear, a lion inside the letter כ (*kaf*), and a beast seeming to be a leopard (standing in the same position as the one illuminating *Zakhor*, but with less elaborate facial and fur detail). The heraldic lion is emphasized by contrast between its white body and the blue background. A biblical emblem of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49.9), the lion may designate the scribe, Judah bar Samuel.³⁴ In Jewish thought, the deer often allegorized the entire people of Israel, for one of the biblical names of the Land of Israel is נַחֲלַת צִבְי (nahalat zevi: literally ‘inheritance of a deer,’ Jer. 3.19). Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, 1040–105), recalled this denomination in his commentary to Daniel’s prophesy of a he-goat that extends its horn אֶל הַצִּבְי (el ha-tzevi: literally, ‘towards the deer;’ Daniel 3.9), stating that the destination is אֶרֶץ צִבְי (erez tzevi: ‘the land of the deer’).

The image of a goat-like animal turning its sharp horns toward the deer suggests that this and the other zoomorphic allegories of the persecutors were inspired by chapters seven and eight in the Book of Daniel. The lion with eagle’s wings, bear, leopard, and a monstrous horned beast, are the “four great beasts” rising from the sea in Daniel 7.3–8. The ibex may be identified with a he-goat in Daniel 8.5: “And as I was considering, behold, a he-goat came from the west ... and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes.” In Daniel 8.21, the rough goat is associated with “the king of Greece.”

The four kingdoms in the Book of Daniel are mentioned in many *Rosh Hashanah selihot* recited before the Day of Atonement and thus appear just a few pages before *Kol Nidrei*.³⁵ The texts clarify that the salvation of a personal soul on the Day of Atonement entails the physical salvation of the whole nation of Israel from the hands of the alien government.³⁶ A *seliha* by Shephtyah ben Amittai of Italy (d. 887), *Israel Nosha be-haShem* (“Israel that is saved by the Lord”),³⁷ reads: “They are intimidated by all their enemies who reproach and revile them [...] Extirpate the tyranny of *Se’ir* [Esau] and his father-in-law [Ishmael] and saviors will rise to Zion.” A young deer escaping from danger and crying for help portrays the people of Israel in the *piyyut Anusa le-Ezra* (“I will flee for help”) allegorically concluding the entire period of the High Holy Days;³⁸ the *piyyut* features the enemy pursuing “smooth-skinned” Israel as one with hairy hands, alluding to Esau, described in Genesis 27.11 as “a hairy man” in contrast to “smooth-skinned” Jacob.

34. For the English translation see Frojmovic, “Early Ashkenazic Prayer Books” 56 n. 8.

35. Goldschmidt, *Mahzor for the High Holy Days*.

36. See Yuval, “God will See the Blood.”

37. Davidson, *Osar ha-shira* 1: 4234. Goldschmidt, *Mahzor for the High Holy Days* 2: 775.

38. Davidson, *Osar has-sira* 1: 6396; Goldschmidt, *Mahzor for the High Holy Days* 1: 265–270; Hollender, *Clavis Commentariorum* 408–09; *In the Michael Mahzor*, fols. 45v–47v.

39. *Arugat ha-Bosem* 3: 295. More commentaries on *Israel Nosha be-haShem* are listed in Hollender, *Clavis Commentariorum* 702.

40. Goldschmidt, *Mahzor for the High Holy Days* 1: 251. The *piyyut* rephrases the Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 29a: “R. Shimon ben Yohai says: Come and see how dear [the nation of] Israel is before The Holy One, Blessed be He, for wherever they were exiled, the Divine Presence was with them. [When] they were exiled to Egypt, the Divine Presence was with them [...] [When] they were exiled to Babylonia, the Divine Presence was with them, as is said, ‘for your sake I sent to Babylonia’ (Isa. 43.14). And also when they will be redeemed [in the future], the Divine Presence will be with them, as is said, ‘and the Lord your God will return your return’ (Deu. 30.3). It does not say ‘and He will cause to return’ (*ve-heshiv*) but ‘and He will return’ (*ve-shav*). This teaches that The Holy One, Blessed be He, will return with them from among the places of exile.”

41. For selected bibliography on Jewish-Christian relations see Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* and *Living Letters of the Law*; Lasker; Malkiel; Marcus, “A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis” and “Jews and Christians Imagining.”

In a gloss to the verse “And saviors will rise to Zion” (Obadiah 1.21) in his *Arugat ha-Bosem*, Rabbi Abraham ben Azriel restated and expanded the association of the enemies of Israel with the kingdoms symbolized by the four animals:

after extirpating the evil kingdom, there will be salvation for Israel [...] when the Lord extirpates the seed of Esau the evil and Ishmael, then shall be salvation and the Messiah will come [...]. I saw in Midrash Tehilim [6.2] that the four beasts that enslaved Israel were double: Babylon and Chaldaea, Media and Persia, Greece and Macedonia, Edom and Ishmael; therefore eight [...] Edom [that was] the fourth [is now] the eighth.³⁹

The worshippers chanting the *piyyut Anusa le-Ezra from Ashkenazi Mahzorim*, proclaimed: “Ve-Nilva li Be-Shevi” (“And He [God] accompanied me in captivity”), expressing their belief that even after the exile from the Holy Land, the people of Israel had not been forsaken by God.⁴⁰ The next verses of the *piyyut* also mention the animals representing the alien kingdoms. For Jews living in Christian countries, explicitly describing Christianity as an evil kingdom that would fall as other ancient kingdoms had, was obviously dangerous.⁴¹ *Arugat ha-Bosem*, written several years before the *Michael Mahzor*, exemplifies the intellectual atmosphere in which repentance provided Jews with hope for redemption from their contemporary evil kingdom, as from ancient ones.

The fourth beast, understood as a pig referring to Edom, is not illustrated; rather, the beasts portrayed here refer to past kingdoms from which Israel was saved. The scene displays more than four beasts around the deer, just as the Book of Daniel mentions more than four beasts if we read chapters 7–8 together. The emphasis is not on the precise numerical count, but on the concept of beasts representing kingdoms that previously enslaved the people of Israel. The contemporary kingdom, which casts fear in the hearts of the people of Israel, is not illuminated, but is implied by the portrayal of the other animals and is borne out by the *Midrash*. The medieval Ashkenazi liturgy of the High Holidays and the illustration to *Kol Nidrei* in the *Michael Mahzor* were thus imbued with the same historiosophy which perceived the religious persecutions of the Jews as temporary and promised that their pious behavior would accelerate the messianic salvation. The deer surrounded by the beasts visualizes the hope

of the worshipers chanting Kol Nidrei for redemption from the persecutors, just as it occurred repeatedly in the past.

Purim and Kippurim

The interesting proximity between Yom Kippurim and Purim with regard to the four kingdoms (as well as the proximate illuminations of *Zakhor* and *Kol Nidrei*) may refer to a concept attested to in a later textual tradition: *Purim like [Yom Ha] Kippurim* (פורים ככיפורים). The aforementioned thirteenth-century unpublished commentary on Exodus by Rabbi Elazar the preacher (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. 202) may shed light on the matter. It contains an extensive discussion of the war against Amalek and stories from the Book of Esther in relation to the inversion between the holidays of Purim and Yom Kippur. Rabbi Elazar's commentary on Sabbath *Shekalim* is based on pericope *Ki Tissa*, Exodus 30.11–16, which describes the raising of funds (*shekalim*) for building the desert tabernacle. The text is read on the first Sabbath morning of the month of Adar. Purim, the climax of the Adar prayers and festivities, is celebrated on the fourteenth of the month. Rabbi Elazar explains the verse from Exodus 30.12: "When you take a head count of the children of Israel according to their numbers, every man shall give atonement money for his soul unto the Lord." He explicitly connects between *Shekalim* and Yom Kippur by explaining that the half-*shekel* in advance for the Temple in the month of Adar is a "down payment" toward redemption on the Day of Atonement.⁴²

Moreover, in the Tripartite *Mahzor*, Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akademia, MS. Kaufmann A 384, f. 34v,⁴³ produced in 1340 near Lake Constance, a marginal commentary on the *piyyut El Mitnase* for Sabbath *Shekalim* is attributed to Rabbi Judah the Pious: "That the Lord is figuring Kippurim money for grace and charity. 'And their enemy shall be thinner.' For the money of Kippurim that came before Haman's money, a thin man and an enemy, Israel were saved, and he failed [...] And they shall view the *Shekhinah*. [Thanks] to the money of Kippurim, which is charity, [they] shall view the glory of the *Shekhinah*."⁴⁴ This source stems from the leader of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, i.e. Rabbi Judah the Pious, Rabbi Eleazar's grandfather; so, we find a similar concept expressed over several generations. At the end of a commentary to *El Mitnase* from an Ashkenazi manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, heb. 709, f. 3r),⁴⁵ a connection is

42. On fol. 242a:

כי תשא את ראש בני ישׁ: משה פרשׁ זׁ
פרשׁ. כי תחילת דבר היא. לענין פרשׁ
שקלים וסמך לכאן שהזכור למעלה עניין
יום הכפורים וביום הכפור נידונין הוא
ומזכירי. הנשמות ונותנין כסף לצדקה.
וסמך כסף כפורים לחטאת הכפורים
שהכסף כמו כן כפרה.

43. The entire manuscript is [available online](#).

44. On fol. 34b:

שהק' חושב להם כסף כפורים לחסד
וצדקה. "וצוררם ירזה". כי לבעבור כסף
כפורים שקדם לכסף המן איש צר ואויב
ניצלו ישר' והוא נכשל ... ושכינה יזכו
לחזה. בשביל כסף כפורים שהוא צדקה
יחזו כבוד השכינה ... צורריהם יומעטו
ויחסרו. המן ובניו. שרבו על ישר'
נתמעטו בזכות כסף כפורים. ועל צוארם
יגברו כד"א ונהפך הוא אשר ישלטו
היהודים. ושובע שמחות יהומו בשמחת
פורים נתחברו. והכל בזכות כסף הכפורים
שנ' והכסף יענה את הכל. ובזכות כסף
הכפורים הצילם בימי אחשורוש.

45. The entire manuscript is [available online](#).

made among Kippur, redemption, and the lily of the valley (associated with Israel) mentioned at the end of the *piyyut*.

A similar concept appears in two additional commentaries, also composed in Ashkenaz during the thirteenth century. The first is Yitzhak bar Yehudah HaLevi's *Paneach Razah* (62), and the second is a commentary of *Ba'al haTurim*, composed by Jacob ben Asher (c. 1270–1340), son of Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel (Rosh) (Gold and Touger). The *Arba'ah Turim* (*Ba'al haTurim*) frequently refers to piteistic writings of Hasidei Ashkenaz regarding religious practices and prayer (Abrams, "From Germany to Spain;" Kanarfogel, *Peering Through the Lattices*; Galinsky): "The Torah juxtaposed Yom Kippur with [the verses that speak of] ransom for his soul, for on that day all the people of the nation are counted and pass before Him. For this reason, it is customary to make pledges to charity on Yom Kippur." As stated above, the *Michael Mahzor* visually and conceptually associates between Purim and Kippurim via the four kingdoms and the same color plate. The use of the animals (even hybrid ones) in this manuscript, more than mere decoration, conveys a polemical message as well as an eschatological one of redemption. Even though they appear in separate volumes of the *Mahzor*, the same visual associative mechanism is used in both. Ideas found in the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* and the rabbis influenced by their writings are apparent in this manuscript's images. By studying the texts and images together and in relation to the Christian milieu, we can achieve a deeper understanding of the original purpose for ordering these illuminations and better reconstruct the original interpretations of the images. Thus, employing known animal symbolism, the patron of this prayer book could insert both polemical and redemptive messages disguised as 'innocent' bestial iconography.

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