

A JEWISH KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOUR: MESSIANIC NARRATIVE AND IMAGINATION IN ASHKENAZIC ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

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The artistic and textual evidence of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Ashkenaz reveals an imagined reality from which we learn that some Jews imagined themselves as aristocrats and knights, despite the fact that the actuality of their everyday lives in medieval Ashkenaz was far from noble or chivalric.¹ In recent years, the imagined identity of Jews portraying themselves as knights has received the attention of scholars, most recently Ivan G. Marcus, whose study focuses on the self-representation of Jews as knights, mainly in written sources.² Marcus discusses the dissonance between actual Christian knights in the Middle Ages, whom he identifies with the crusaders, and the fact that Jews considered themselves knights. He explains that

Jewish self-comparison to knights seems to have begun in the shared religious frenzy that started with Pope Urban II's speech at Clermont on 27 November 1095, for an armed pilgrimage to Jerusalem, that later came to be called the First Crusade.³

This phenomenon, which began after the First Crusade, reached a climax during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Jewish written and artistic form.

A number of Hebrew manuscripts contain scenes of knights. They portray characters of a noble and aristocratic nature, as shown in the research of Sarit Shalev-Eyni, who focused on the study of manuscripts made around the Lake Constance region in the fourteenth century.⁴ In this paper, I shall investigate the significance of warriors and knights illustrated in Hebrew manuscripts from thirteenth-century Ashkenaz with regard to the battle these warriors are symbolically fighting and the incongruity between art and reality, with a focus on Jewish imaginative ideas of the messiah. In this paper I shall discuss biblical exegesis, *piyyutim* (liturgical poems),⁵ commentary on the *piyyutim*, and the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* (the German Pietists). With regard to these texts, I will examine the imagined messianic narrative through scenes of warriors, with a focus on two Ashkenazi illuminated manuscripts.

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- 1 Sara Offenberg, "Resisting Conversion or the True Aristocrat: Jews Imagining Themselves in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts," in *Sefer ha-Yovel for Burton D. Morris*, ed. Menachem Butler (New York) (forthcoming).
 - 2 Ivan G. Marcus, "Why is this Knight Different? A Jewish Self-Representation in Medieval Europe," in *Tov Elem: Memory, Community and Gender in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish Societies: Essays in honor of Robert Bonfil*, eds. Elisheva Baumgarten, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, Roni Weinstein (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2011), 139-152.
 - 3 *Ibid.*, 144.
 - 4 Sarit Shalev-Eyni, *Jews among Christians: Hebrew Book Illumination from Lake Constance* (London: Harvey Miller, 2010), 85-92. Gabrielle Sed-Rejna studied the knights illustrated in the French manuscript *Mishneh Torah* in the Kaufmann collection, made in 1296 (also called *Codex Maimuni*). Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Kaufmann Collection, Ms. A.77, vol. II. See the manuscript on the web site: <http://kaufmann.mtak.hu/index-en.html> (accessed January 22, 2013). Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, "The Illustrations of the Kaufmann *Mishneh Torah*," *Journal of Jewish Art* 6 (1979): 64-77.
 - 5 Henceforth, I shall refer to liturgical poems by the Hebrew term *piyyut*.

Warriors, especially knights, are portrayed in Ashkenazic manuscripts both in miniature paintings and in micrography. For example, a micrography of two knights is displayed in an Ashkenazi bible made in the second half of the thirteenth century (London, British Library Or. 2091, fol. 203a).⁶ The page contains three columns of text. On the right, the last verses from Isaiah 66:21-24 are written, while the two other columns contain the beginning of Ezekiel 1:1-23. The *masorah* micrography portrays the four creatures from Ezekiel's vision. On the upper *masorah* line we see, from right to left, the upper bodies of an eagle, a man wearing a helmet and chain armour, a lion and an ox. The *masorah* on the lower margins creates a rectangular frame containing the full bodies of the creatures from Ezekiel's vision in a different order: the lion on the right faces the ox, and the man dressed in full armour and holding an object in each arm faces the eagle, whose wings are spread.

Most portrayals of the four creatures in Jewish art follow the Christian convention of displaying the creatures with wings, making the human figure usually appears like an angel. The choice to portray the human figure in full armour and actually as a knight can be explained by the tradition of seeing Jacob's image engraved upon the throne in Ezekiel's vision.⁷ This notion is rooted in the Aramaic version of Gen. 28:12 regarding Jacob's dream, where the angels climbed up the ladder to view his image engraved upon the throne.⁸ The knight in this micrography illustrates the verse: *Abir Jacob*, meaning Jacob the Knight. In Genesis 49:24, Jacob is called a knight, and he is called by this term twice in Isaiah 49:26, 60:16 and in Psalms 132:2, 5. In Psalm 132, the notion of Jacob the knight appears with regard to the Lord's promise to restore the Messiah from the house of David, and the Psalm mentions the Lord's throne. The tradition of Jacob's image engraved upon the throne was studied at length by Elliot R. Wolfson, who explored both mystical and sexual aspects of this motif in rabbinic literature and in the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* (also with references to the Zoharic literature), and who describes in detail how this motif evolved and was utilized in the commentaries on Ezekiel's chariot.⁹ The narrative of Jacob engraved upon the throne was literally portrayed in the micrography, as we can see in the depiction of Jacob the Knight dressed in full armour.

An illumination of Jacob engraved upon the throne is illustrated in the *Leipzig Mahzor*, Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. V 1102/I, fol.31a, made in Worms around

6 George Margoliouth, *Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1899), sign. 117; Therese and Mendel Metzger, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages: Illuminated Hebrew Manuscripts of the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries* (New York: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, 1982) 269, 271; Ilana Tahan, *Hebrew Manuscripts: The Power of Script and Image* (London: British Library, 2007) 133-135. See also the British Library website:

<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=19263&CollID=96&NStart=2091>

(accessed January 22, 2013).

7 On this idea in relation to the verse *Abir Jacob* see Eleazar of Worms (Rokeach), *A Commentary on the Jewish Prayerbook*, eds. Moshe and Yehudah Hershler, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Machon HaRav Hershler, 1992), II, sign. 81, 522 (Hebrew).

8 E. G. Clarke, trans., *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Pub. House, 1984), 33; David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1988), 121.

9 Elliot R. Wolfson, *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism, and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 1-62.

1310, as studied by Katrin Kogman-Appel.¹⁰ Jacob is represented by the human figure, as one of the four creatures that illustrate the initial panel of the *piyyut El Mitnase* for tractate *Shekalim*.¹¹ The four creatures are illuminated in separate medallions around the initial word *El* (God) of the *piyyut*, which is decorated with a balance surrounded by two dragons, and above the initial panel a dog is chasing a hare. The human figure displayed as a hooded man holding a book is different than any portrayal in Jewish or Christian art.¹² According to Kogman-Appel, the image reflects ideas based on the mystical writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, especially those of Rabbi Elazar of Worms, regarding a vision of the human figure of Jacob engraved on the throne.¹³ In the *Leipzig Mahzor*, the human figure can be interpreted as representing the image of Jacob, but the scribes of the Bible micrography went even further by portraying Jacob according to the verse that describes him in the biblical passages, representing him as “Jacob the Knight”.

The knights in Jewish writings portray the more spiritual aspects of noble warriors. 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.”¹⁴ In discussing passages from the *Sefer Hasidim* of Rabbi Judah the Pious, Marcus states that the Jewish writer sees the positive value of the knightly code of honour and valorous behaviour, but implies that the Jewish pietist, without expecting any reward, should behave in this manner and serve the lord fearlessly.¹⁵ As opposed to the war-like nature of the images in the micrography, the illumination for *El Mitnase* depicts the pietistic nature of Jacob with regard to the meaning of the *piyyut*. I wish to further elaborate on the *piyyut El Mitnase* by focusing on a scene that illustrates two warriors in the *Michael Mahzor*, the earliest dated illuminated Mahzor, and examining their relation to the messianic narrative.

The *piyyut* “*El Mitnase*” for tractate *Shekalim*, based on Exodus 30:11-16, describes the raising of money (*shekalim*) for building the desert tabernacle. In the *Michael Mahzor*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Mich. 617, fol. 4a,¹⁶ made in Ashkenaz in 1258, the text is decorated with a rectangular frame, while the initial panel displays an unusual upside-down scene. The initial panel of “*El Mitnase*” contains a scene on a yellow and blue background.

10 Katrin Kogman-Appel, *A Mahzor from Worms: Art and Religion in a Medieval Jewish Community* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 175–182; Elisabeth Revel-Neher, Mati Meyer, and Katrin Kogman-Appel, eds., “The Scales in the Leipzig Mahzor: Penance and Eschatology in Early Fourteenth-Century Germany,” in *Between Judaism and Christianity: Art Historical Essays in Honor of Elisheva (Elisabeth) Revel-Neher* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 307–318 esp. 315f.

11 Israel Davidson, *Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry*, 4 vols. (New York: Hebrew Union College, 1970), I, 3853 (Hebrew).

12 The four creatures displayed in Christian art are understood to be the symbols of the Evangelists and are associated with the Second Coming of Christ. The relationship between the image of the four evangelists, the Throne of Glory, and the Ark of Covenant in Christian art was studied by Jeffrey F. Hamburger. See Jeffrey F. Hamburger, “Off Limits: The Ark of the Covenant as a Site of Taboo and Transgression,” (paper delivered at the fourth IMAGO Conference, Tel Aviv University, May 31, 2011). I thank the author for generously sharing his written paper with me. See also Herbert L. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God’s Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

13 Kogman-Appel, *Mahzor from Worms*, 179-182.

14 Marcus, “Why is this Knight Different?” 148.

15 *Ibid.*, 151-152.

16 Adolf Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and in the College Libraries of Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886-1906), Nr. 1033.

See the image on the Bodleian Library website:

<http://bodleian.thejewishmuseum.org/?p=1> (accessed January 22, 2013).

When inverted, the panel portrays a hunt scene. On the right we notice an archer dressed in green, wearing a great helmet, kneeling, and drawing his bow.¹⁷ In front of him, two dogs are chasing a deer. On the left, a warrior dressed in red is holding a round shield and brandishing 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. As mentioned, the *piyyut* has been studied by Kogman-Appel, who along with ideas of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, also found messianic notions in this *piyyut*'s illumination in the *Leipzig Mahzor*. In what follows, I shall examine the inverted scene in the *Michael Mahzor*, its connection to the meaning of the *piyyut*, and the context of the messianic narrative. The animals and warriors in the scene will be connected to the Jewish-Christian polemic and interpreted as referring to eschatology.

The *Michael Mahzor* has rarely been studied, with the exception of Gabrielle Sed-Rajna's research.¹⁸ After the *Crossing Borders* exhibition in 2009, which displayed the *Michael Mahzor* and a number of other manuscripts from the Bodleian Library, it received further attention, mainly from Eva Frojmovic, who addressed our scene in the exhibition's catalogue.¹⁹ The scribe Judah bar Samuel 'Zaltman' wrote his name in the colophon written in the second volume, MS. Mich. 627, fol. 174, alongside the date of production.²⁰ According to Frojmovic, the illustration is the work of a non-Jewish artist who could not read Hebrew, and therefore the scene is inverted. 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.²¹

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 want to suggest here that the scene was inverted intentionally, and not due to a lack of understanding.²²

Furthermore, in another illumination in this *mahzor*, several pages after our folio on fol. 16b, we find an illustration of the *piyyut* "*Va'ye'ehav Oman Yetomat Hegan*" ("The Nurse Cared for the Orphan of the Garden") for Purim.²³ It depicts the tree of Haman and his

17 The Great Helmet was invented around 1220, and was much more protective than the helmets used previously. This helmet has a flat top and surrounds the entire head, thus also protecting the warrior's face. Kelly DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, c1992), 70-73.

18 Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *La mahzor enluminé: les voies de formation d'un programme iconographique* (Leiden: Brill, 1983) 13-14, 63-64. Bezalel Narkiss mentions this *mahzor* in the Hebrew edition of his book: *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*, (Jerusalem: Keter Press, 1984), 43-44 (first published in English, 1969). On the illustration for *Kol Nidrei* in the second volume of the *Michael Mahzor*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Mich. 627, fol. 48r, see my article: "Illuminations of *Kol Nidrei* in Two Ashkenazi Mahzorim," *Ars Judaica* 7 (2011): 7-16.

19 Eva Frojmovic, "Early Ashkenazic Prayer Books and Their Christian Illuminators," in *Crossing Borders: Hebrew Manuscripts as a Meeting-Place of Cultures*, ed. Piet van Boxel and Sabine Arndt (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2010), 45-56.

20 For the English translation see Frojmovic, "Early Ashkenazic Prayer Books," 56, n. 8.

21 Frojmovic, "Early Ashkenazic Prayer Books," 49-51.

22 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.

23 Davidson, *Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry*, III, 197; Sed-Rajna, *La mahzor enluminé*,

sons, arranged horizontally.²⁴ 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.

I would like to provide another explanation for the inverted illustration of the “*El Mitnase*” scene. In order to understand the *piyyut* and its illumination, we should study the context in which it appears in the *Mahzor*. “*El Mitnase*” is recited on the first Sabbath morning of the month of Adar. Purim, which is the climax of the Adar prayers and festivities, is celebrated on the fourteenth of the month. This month contains the “four special Sabbaths,” when four different additions are made to the regular weekly chapter reading. The four special portions of the Torah are entitled *Shekalim* (Exodus 30:11-16), *Zakhor* (Deuteronomy 25:17-19), *Parah* (Numbers 19:1-22), and *Sabbath ha-Hodesh* (Exodus 12:1-20). I suggest that the scene depicting the tree of Haman and his sons alludes to the phrase from Esther 9:1: “it was turned to the contrary.” These words appear at the end of the verse:

Now in the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have rule over them; whereas it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them (Esther 9:1).

The phrase “it was turned to the contrary” will guide us in our discussion, as it is literally portrayed in our scene in the *Michael Mahzor*. In the Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 13b, we find the reason why the additional torah reading *Shekalim* is located before that of *Zakhor*, which tells the story of Haman:

“If it please your majesty let an edict be drawn for their destruction and I will pay ten thousand talent of silver” ... Said Resh Laqish: It was clearly known to the one who spoke and made the world come into being that Haman would pay sheqels for Israel. Therefore he advanced their sheqels to his.

The 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 redeem 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 hunt scene illuminates the *piyyut* in the *Michael Mahzor* and, as Kogman-Appel has demonstrated, also the *Leipzig Mahzor*, where a hound dog on the right is sniffing after a hare that is running free on the left.²⁵ As Kurt Schubert and numerous other scholars of

23-24.

24 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 Marc Michael Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah: Art, Narrative, and Religious Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 48-61.

25 Kogman-Appel, “The Scales in the Leipzig Mahzor,” 310. Another hunt scene that illustrates this *piyyut* can be found in the *Laud Mahzor*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Laud Or. 321, fol. 38a, probably written in Franconia around 1240-1260. The image depicted on the arch portrays, from left to right, four men and two dogs chasing a deer and a hare. See the image on the Bodleian Library website: <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley/about/exhibitions/online/crossing->

Jewish art have demonstrated, hunting scenes are common in Jewish illuminated manuscripts.²⁶ They are understood as allegories of the Jew, usually represented as a hare or a deer, being persecuted by the Christians, shown as a hunter and his dogs. In Christian art, white dogs with black spots often represent the Dominican friars, who are also known as “Dogs of the Lord” (*domini canes*).²⁷ Schubert 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹

The portrayal of Esau the hunter is connected to the four Kingdoms that enslaved Israel – Babylon, Medea, Greece, and Edom – in *Midrash Genesis 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).³⁰

[borders/public-prayer-books#](#) (accessed January 22, 2013).

- 26 Kurt Schubert, “Wikkuach-Thematik in den Illustationen Habräischer Handschriften,” *Jewish Art* 12-13 (1986-1987): 247-256. See also: Meir Ayali, “*Halakhah* and *Aggadah* in Haggadah Illustrations,” *Alei Siach* 15/16 (1982): 262–268 (Hebrew); Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1997); Elliot Horowitz, “Odd Couples: The Eagle and the Hare, the Lion and the Unicorn,” *JSQ* 11 (2004): 252–258; Sara Offenber, “Expressions of Meeting the Challenges of the Christian Milieu in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature” (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2008), chap. 4 (Hebrew); Offenber, “Illuminations of *Kol Nidrei*.”
- 27 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 1365–1367. Schubert, “Wikkuach-Thematik,” 251–252, Fig. 6. See also Kenneth Stow, *Jewish Dogs: An Image and Its Interpreters: Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 137-144. Andrea di Bonaiuto’s fresco “Allegory of the Triumphant Church and the Dominican Order” is reproduced in Joseph Polzer, “Andrea di Bonaiuto’s *Via Veritatis* and Dominican Thought in Late Medieval Italy,” *The Art Bulletin* 77/ 2 (1995): 262-289.
- 28 Schubert, “Wikkuach-Thematik,” 251–254.
- 29 According to Gerson Cohen, the tradition of Esau and Edom as symbolizing Rome can be traced back to Rabbi Akiba (died c. 135) (cf. *Genesis Rabba* 65:21). This association with Rome was turned toward Christianity during the Middle Ages. According to Cohen, medieval Jews believed that “Esau might exchange his eagle for a cross, but he was Esau nonetheless.” Gerson Cohen, “Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967) 19-48 esp. 29. See also Offenber, “Expressions of Meeting the Challenges,” 113-118; Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
- 30 Jacob Neusner, trans. *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis*, 3 vols. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), II, 389.

In this *midrash* we find a clear connection between Esau the hunter, Haman, and two more items that appear in our scene: a bow and a sword. The verse mentioned here from Zechariah 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

is also connected to the *piyyut* by the verse that precedes it in Zechariah 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.”³¹ While the term *Bizzaron* is based on the Biblical verse from Zechariah 9:12, the Rose of Sharon stands for the people of Israel, as mentioned in the *Midrash Song of Songs Rabbah* 2:1. The context of this verse in the *piyyut* is that the people of Israel will always have a hope and a stronghold for redemption. By keeping the Law and paying the money for the temple, the people of Israel redeem themselves and will be saved from their enemies.

Ephraim and Judah, mentioned in the quoted sources, bring to mind the Jewish tradition of the two saviours. 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.³² 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 the People of Israel, who will be led by the two Messiahs.³³ This well-known tradition appears already in the ancient *midrash*, in the *Book of Zerubavel*,³⁴ and in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century writings of the Tosafists in France and Germany. Therefore, we may assume that the idea of two Messiahs was familiar to the readers and viewers of the *Michael Mahzor*. The

31 My translation.

32 Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 52a.

33 Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 18 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), V, 138-168, 353-367; David Berger, “Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: Messiah Son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations, and the Figure of Armilus,” *AJS Review* 10/2 (1985): 141-164; David Biale, “Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity: the *Sefer Toldot Yeshu* and the *Sefer Zerubavel*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6/1 (1999): 130-145; Joseph Dan, “Armilus: The Jewish Antichrist and the Origins of the *Sefer Zerubbavel*,” in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, eds. Peter Schäfer and Mark Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 73-104; Moshe Gil, “The Apocalypse of Zerubbabel in Judaeo-Arabic,” *Revue des Études Juives* 165/1-2 (2006): 1-98; Lutz Greisiger, “Armilos – Vorläufer, Entstehung und Fortleben der Antichrist-Gestalt im Judentum,” in *Der Antichrist: Historische und systematische Zugänge*, eds. Mariano Delgado and Volker Leppin (Fribourg: Academic Press; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag GmbH, 2011), 207-240; Lutz Greisiger, “Die Geburt des Armilos und die Geburt des ‘Sohnes des Verderbens’: Zeugnisse der jüdisch-christlicher Auseinandersetzung um die Identifikation des Antichristen im 7. Jahrhundert,” in *Antichrist: Konstruktionen von Feindbildern*, ed. Wolfram Brandes (Berlin: Akad.-Verl., 2010), 24–32. I thank Lutz Greisiger for sharing these articles with me. Israel Lévi, “L’apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi Perse Siroés,” *REJ* 68 (1914): 129-160; 69 (1919): 108-121; 71 (1920): 57-63; Offenberg, “Expressions of Meeting the Challenges,” 136-141; Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979); Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 33-38.

34 Yehudah Even-Shmuel, *Midreshei Geulah* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1954) (Hebrew); *Beit ha-Midrash*, ed. Adolph Jellinek, 6 vols. (Leipzig: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1852), II, 54-57.

figures of the armed men could be understood as each symbolizing a Messiah: son of Joseph and son of David.

There seems to be an increase in interest in the two Messiahs and Armilus in the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*,³⁵ for example in the book *Arugat Habosem*, an elaborated commentary on *piyyulim* written around 1234 in Bohemia by R. Abraham bar. Azriel, a student of R. Eleazar of Worms.³⁶ There are references and long commentaries on this Messianic narrative that still remain in unpublished manuscripts, such as the commentaries on the Bible of R. Elazar ben Moshe the preacher in München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 221,³⁷ and his commentary on Exodus in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. 202,³⁸ where the two saviours appear in relation to the revenge against the Gentiles.

As shown by the studies of Israel Jacob Yuval,³⁹ Ephraim Kanarfogel,⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ Elliot S. Horowitz showed a connection between the celebration of *Purim* and violence against Christians

35 This does not mean that the illustration is based on or influenced directly by the writings of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, but rather that there was a great deal of interest in this issue during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Ashkenaz. A thorough study of the entire iconographical plan is needed to determine a closer relationship between the *Michael Mahzor* and *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.

36 Abraham bar Azriel, *Arugat ha-Bosem*, ed. Ephraim Urbach, 4 vols. (Jerusalem: Sumptibus Mekize Nirdamim, 1939-1963) (Hebrew). According to Elisabeth Hollender, the need for *piyyut* commentary emerged from the difficulty of understanding words and phrases in the *piyyulim*. Although in most cases we know the names of the *payettanim* (writers of *piyyulim*), there are few *piyyut* commentaries where we can identify the author's name, so most of these authors remain anonymous. On *piyyut* commentary, see Elisabeth Hollender, "Narrative Exegesis in Ashkenaz and Zarfai: The Case of 'Piyyut-Commentary,'" in *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Proceedings of the 6th EAJIS Congress, Toledo, July 1998. Vols. 1-2*, ed. Judit Targarona Borrás and Angel Sáenz-Badillos (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 429-435; Elisabeth Hollender, *Piyyut Commentary in Medieval Ashkenaz* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 2-6.

37 On this manuscript, see Daniel Abrams, "A Commentary to the *Sefer Yetsirah* by Rabbi Eleazar the Preacher," *Ale Sefer* 19 (2001): 69-87 (Hebrew); "*Sefer Ha-Yehud* of R. Eleazar ha-Darshan," *Qobes 'al Yad* 12 (2004): 149-160 (Hebrew). More on R. Eleazar the Preacher, see Amos Geulah, "Lost Aggadic Works Known only from Ashkenaz" (PhD diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006), 17 (Hebrew); Amos Geulah, "*Midrash Avkir*" (MA thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998), 121 (Hebrew).

38 Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew*, Nr. 945.

39 Israel Jacob Yuval, "Jewish Messianic Expectations Towards 1240 and Christian reactions," in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, eds. Peter Schäfer and Mark Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 105-121; Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, chap. 6.

40 Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Medieval Rabbinic Conceptions of the Messianic Age: The View of the Tosafists," in *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life, in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, ed. Ezra Fleischer et al. (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2001), 147-169.

41 Yuval, "Jewish Messianic Expectations;" Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 33-49, 92-106, 173-174.

among some Ashkenazi Jews.⁴² The sword in our image has blood on it, and this may refer to the verses from Isaiah 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 could be interpreted as referring not only to Edom, but also to those associated with it, the Christians. In the context outlined by Yuval and Horowitz, this small detail seems a particularly relevant one.

Previously, it was suggested that the inverted scene represents the biblical verse from Esther 9:1: “whereas it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them.” It displays the notion not merely of salvation, but also of vengeance and rule over their 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 often in marginal illuminations that display mainly animals.⁴³ Kurt Schubert studied an example of the *inversus mundi* in the illuminated *Haggadah*, London, British Library, MSS. Add. 14761, fol. 30v, made in Catalonia in 1330-1340, where we find a scene displaying a dog and a hare; the dog is in an inferior position, as opposed to the hare, which is portrayed as an aristocrat.⁴⁴ Although the hare usually represents the people of Israel being harassed by a dog representing the Christians, in this image the hare is seated on a throne, while a dog serves him a drink in a golden chalice. This scene is placed over the word *avadim* (slaves), which begins the description of the Israelites’ slavery in Egypt. However, here the contemporary oppressors are not the Egyptians, but rather the Christians, and therefore the meaning of the scene is reversed: instead of representing the Jews as slaves, the dog, representing the Christians, plays the role of the servant.⁴⁵

42 Elliot S. Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Elliot S. Horowitz, “The Rite to Be Reckless: On the Perpetration and Interpretation of Purim Violence,” *Poetics Today* 15/1 (1994): 9-54.

43 On the upside-down world in Jewish art see Ursula Schubert, “Zwei Tierszenen am ende der Ersten Kennicott-Bibel la Coruna, 1476, in Oxford,” *Jewish Art* 12-13 (1986-1987): 83-88. For more on the characters of animals and the upside-down world see David Kunzle, “World Upside Down: The Iconography of a European Broadsheet Type,” in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. Barbara A. Babcock (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 39-94; David A. Sprunger, “Parodic Animal Physicians from the Margins of Medieval Manuscripts,” in *Animals in the Middle Ages*, ed. Nona C. Flores (New York: Routledge, 2000), 67-81. For more on *inversus mundi* see Malcolm Jones, “Folklore Motifs in Late Medieval Art I: Proverbial Follies and Impossibilities,” *Folklore* 100/2 (1989): 201-217. On marginalia see Michael Camille, *Images on the Edge: the Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); Lillian Randell, *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts* (Berkeley: University of Calif. Press, 1966); Lucy Sandler, “The Study of Marginal Imagery: Past, Present, and Future,” *Studies in Iconography* 18 (1997): 1-49.

44 See the image on the British Library website:

<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=49342> (accessed January 22, 2013).

45 Schubert, “Wikkuach-Thematik,” 250-251.

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.” R. Elazar of Worms (1176-1238) wrote a commentary on the *Siddur*, where he explains this verse in terms of vengeance against the Gentiles.⁴⁶ This inverse world, then, may serve as a reflection of the intellectual atmosphere in Ashkenaz during the first half of the thirteenth century.⁴⁷ 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, as opposed to other images that portray a hind. Both the deer and the hind represent 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. 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 the crusades (and we should note that the Seventh Crusade, which lasted six years, ended just four years before the production of this manuscript).⁴⁸ Kogman-Appel has demonstrated that the *El Mitnase* hunt scene in the *Leipzig Mahzor* is related to messianic ideas: “This variation of the hunting motif thus shows an earlier stage, one in which the preconditions for the arrival of the Messiah are about to be fulfilled.”⁴⁹ We may 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.⁵⁰ As is described in 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’ (Zec. 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; and 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 money (*shekalim*)

46 Rokeach, *A Commentary on the Jewish Prayerbook*, II, sign. 130, 753.

47 For more on the issue of the intellectual atmosphere see Ephraim Kanarfogel, *The Intellectual History and Rabbinic Culture of Medieval Ashkenaz* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), esp. chs. 3-4.

48 Elchanan Reiner, “Jews in the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem,” in *Knights of the Holy Land: The Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*, ed. Silvia Rozenberg (Jerusalem: □ Israel Museum, □ 1999), 49-59.

49 Kogman-Appel, “The Scales in the Leipzig Mahzor,” 310.

50 Rachel Wischnitzer, “The Messianic Fox,” in *From Dura to Rembrandt: Studies in the History of Art* (Milwaukee: □ Aldrich, 1990), 70-75 (first published in: *Review of Religion* 5 (1941): 257-263). For more on the fox in an illustration in the *Paduah Ashkenazi Mahzor* see Offenberg, “Illuminations of *Kol Nidrei*,” 14-15.

for the building of the desert tabernacle, as well as half a *shekel* for the Temple. Thus, the deep association of the *piyyut's* meaning with the Temple suggests that the fox here deserves consideration in light of messianic narrative.⁵¹

The images of Jewish Knights in medieval Jewish art continue a midrashic theme of the reversal of tragedy through redemption. This originates in the celebration of the month of *Adar* that commemorates the great salvation in which the people of Israel were facing a tremendous danger, but which they emerged victorious. This reversal is represented in the statement that “it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them” (Esther 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, and the upcoming salvation as demonstrated by the warriors. The salvation is viewed in terms of the biblical verse from Esther 9:1, which implies that not only will the Messiah come, but also that he will gather the people of Israel and ascend the mountain of Zion and the Temple will be rebuilt. This image may reflect the notion that the exceptional reversal of *Purim* in this world will become the norm in the Messianic era. As a result, the “Jewish knight” becomes a central symbol to express this messianic yearning among thirteenth and fourteenth century Ashkenazi Jews. While different artistic images portray this desire, such as the image portraying the learned nature of the knight, i.e. Jacob the knight, as well as the heroic nature of the Messiah, they all embody the visionary mystical ideas and the hope for redemption.

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51 A further connection to salvation motifs may be found in the portrayal of the peacocks at the lower margins of the scene. 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. Dalia-Ruth Halperin, “Illuminating in Micrography – Between Script and Brush: The Catalan Micrography Mahzor,” MS Heb 8°6527 in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem” (PhD diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2008), 240, 277-281 (Hebrew). The *Michael Mahzor* is suffused with these birds, in various scenes, and here the peacocks may represent another aspect of the messianic aspiration.

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