Animals and Gazing at Women: Zoocephalic Figures in the Tripartite Mahzor

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Zoocephalic figures constitute a separate class within the fauna of medieval book illumination. These half human – half animal creatures are present in Christian as well as in Jewish manuscripts. The focus of my study will be on the zoocephalia found in Hebrew codices with special emphasis upon a festival prayer book, the so-called Tripartite Mahzor.

The zoocephalic motif is a characteristic feature of several illuminated medieval Ashkenazi manuscripts produced in Southern Germany and in the Rhineland from the second third of the thirteenth century until the mid-fourteenth century. Although these manuscripts were produced in the same area and in the same period, and animal-headed figures in them always behave as human beings and not as animals, the group is not completely homogeneous. The use of the zoocephalic motif seems to have followed various patterns from manuscript to manuscript. Moreover, the characteristics, that is, the appearance of the animal heads are also quite different. Therefore, it is necessary to examine each book, and then draw a conclusion concerning the whole group. The Tripartite Mahzor, which I have chosen, shows a tendency to depict women with animal heads and men with human heads. The aim of this contribution is to investigate the pattern of the visual distinction of gender by means of animal heads and to compare it with other patterns.

Many scholars have attempted to find an explanation for the zoocephalic phenomenon. Zofia Ameisenowa studied the animal-headed figures in the Roman mystery religions, in Jewish and Christian culture, and concluded that zoocephalia meant the same in all three traditions: it was a sign of righteousness.[1] Heavenly creatures as well as the dead and sometimes even living pious people were depicted with animal heads, which gave a higher status to these figures in contrast with other figures in the images.[2]

[1] Zofia Ameisenowa, "Animal-headed Gods, Evangelists, Saints and Righteous Men," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12 (1949): 21-45.

[2] On her theory concerning the Tripartite Mahzor, see ibidem, 31-32.

Meyer Schapiro and H. C. L. Jaffé considered the zoocephalic motif in Jewish culture as a method avoiding the depiction of human figures.[3] Both referred to a responsum of Rabbi Meir von Rothenburg, in which the latter stated that although animals and birds appearing in illuminated books did not transgress the prohibition of visual representation, it was not proper to paint them since they could draw the reader's attention away from prayer.[4] He referred, that way, obviously to the illuminators who had decided to paint humans with animal heads so as not to transgress the Second Commandment. According to Jaffé, the fact that in some manuscripts humans were depicted both with animal and human faces can be explained by the later production of the manuscripts. They were made after the death of Rabbi Meir, and at that time the painters or patrons no longer took his principles so seriously any more.

Heinrich Strauss approached the problem from another point of view.[5] According to him, there must have been several different causes for zoocephalic figures in the various manuscripts. One acceptable explanation may lie in the relationship of the Jewish minority and the Christian majority. The animal-headed figures were taken over from Christian depictions of Jews. The zoocephalic motif was an antisemitic sign even in Jewish manuscripts. Since Jews did not have the tradition of depicting human figures, they copied the Christian way of portraying Jews.

Bezalel Narkiss regarded the phenomenon as a result of the influence of different Jewish authorities. On the one hand, the twelfth-/thirteenth-century German Jewish pietist movement, the Hasidei Ashkenaz, may have had an impact on mainstream Judaism.[6] This movement forbade any kind of decoration in books, in buildings or on clothing. Therefore, they could not have ordered a richly decorated prayer book themselves. But their strict ideas could also have stimulated the non-pietist patrons of the manuscripts to avoid the most critical representations, that is, of human beings, and in this way could have resulted in the distortion of human figures in such manuscripts or in their representation with animal heads. On the other hand, the distortion of human figures can be traced back to Talmudic discourse on the visual representation of human beings, and the interpretations of this discourse by medieval rabbis. The inconsistent use

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[3] H. C. L. Jaffé, "The Illustrations," in *The Bird's Head Haggadah of Bezalel National Art Museum in Jerusalem*, ed. Moshe Spitzer (Jerusalem: Tarshish Books, 1967), 31-88; Meyer Schapiro, "Introduction," in ibidem, 15-19.

[4] For the responsum see Tamás Turán, *Képfogyatkozás. Vázlat az ikonofóbia történetéből a rabbinikus hagyományban* [Eclipse of the image. Outline of the history of iconophobia in the rabbinical tradition] (Budapest: Akadémia kiadó, 2004), 127-128; Vivian B. Mann, ed., *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 110-111.

[5] Heinrich Strauss, *Die Kunst der Juden im Wandel der Zeit und Umwelt* (Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth, 1972), 58-61.

[6] Bezalel Narkiss, "On the Zoocephalic Phenomenon in Medieval Ashkenazi Manuscripts," in *Norms and Variations in Art. Essays in Honour of Moshe Barasch* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), 49-62. Before expounding his own theory, Narkiss surveyed the previous research on the problem.

of the motif was due to the fact that in the fourteenth century people no longer remembered the cause of the distortion, and animal heads were considered merely decorative elements. This may have been the reason, why in the Tripartite Mahzor only women were depicted with animal heads.[7]

Finally, Ruth Mellinkoff used a similar argument to Heinrich Strauss.[8] However, she herself concentrated on the person of the painter, while Strauss considered this unimportant. She stated that these manuscripts were produced by Christian painters, who expressed their antisemitic feelings by portraying Jews with distorted faces or animal heads as a sign of mockery. In the Tripartite Mahzor, men are portrayed in profile and wear pointed hats, both being negative motifs. Women could not have been depicted in hats; thus, they got the heads of disgusting or evil animals.[9] The Jews who ordered these manuscripts either did not discover the mocking purpose of the artists or did not dare to protest because of the many antisemitic attacks at the time. This argument seems to be weak. It is not plausible that the Jews did not know the way in which they were mocked. Moreover, after discovering the artists' "hidden" purpose, they would not have ordered more illuminated manuscripts from Christian masters, and chiefly, would not have used liturgical (!) books which were full of antisemitic signs.

I want to offer another possible interpretation for the animal-headed figures in the Tripartite Mahzor. First, it is necessary to unravel how consistently this pattern was applied in the Mahzor. To what degree was the painter consistent in distinguishing gender? This investigation has to be succeeded by a survey of the possible theological or spiritual context. There, the *Sefer Hasidim*, the main ethical writing of the German Pietists, that is, the Hasidei Ashkenaz, is especially worth considering. To judge the plausibility of a possible interpretation it is also indispensable to survey the use of the zoocephalic motif in other manuscripts and to attempt a comparative analysis.

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The Tripartite Mahzor is divided into three parts. The first part is preserved in Budapest, in the Kaufmann collection of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MS A384). It contains prayers and piyyuts for special Shabbats, Purim, Pesah (Passover), and the Song of Songs. The second part (London, British Library Add. Ms. 22413) contains prayers and piyyuts for Shavuot, the Book of Ruth, Sukkot and the Book of Ecclesiastes. In the third volume (Oxford, Bodleian Library Ms. Michael 619) there are prayers and piyyuts for Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur. While the size of the codices is different, the size of the

[7] Bezalel Narkiss, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1978), 108.

[8] Ruth Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts from Medieval Germany* (Jerusalem: Center of Jewish Art – The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999).

[9] Ibidem, 37-38.

text areas and the style of the illuminations are the same.[10] Therefore, the three volumes probably originally constituted a one- or two-volume codex, which began with Rosh ha-Shanah and ended with Shavuot.[11] It may have been cut and divided into three parts some time later. None of the volumes has a colophon. The only name given is that of the scribe. He was a certain Hayyim. His name, "ח"ם," is written at the end of the commentary to Ruth (vol.2, fol. 80v). The word "ח"ם," in its meaning of "life" also appears with some special decoration on another page of the same volume (fol. 103v).[12]

The style of the illuminations resembles strongly that of early fourteenth-century Southern German Latin miniatures. The World Chronicle of St. Gall (c. 1300, St. Gall, Stadtbibliothek Ms Vadiana 302), the Graduale of St. Katharinental (1312, Zurich, Landesmuseum Ms. 128) and the Manesse Codex (Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek Pal. Germ. 848) are its closest stylistic Christian parallels. Sarit Shalev-Eyni, the monographist of the manuscript, holds that the Mahzor was illuminated in the same Christian workshop where the Graduale of St. Katherinenthal was executed. She assumes that a Jewish scholar instructed the Christian artists in iconographical questions.[13]

The date of the manuscript was determined by Bezalel Narkiss, in the absence of a colophon, on the basis of three criteria.[14] First, all three volumes mention Rabbi Meir ben Baruch von Rothenburg (c. 1215-1293) as the author of certain piyyuts, once as "my deceased teacher Rabbi Meir" – so the manuscript must have been written after 1293.[15] Second, on the miniature decorating Shabbat ha-Gadol (vol. 1, fol. 103v) two knights are fighting. Their coats of arms can be identified as the ones of Bavaria and Austria. The image may refer to the battle between King Frederick the Fair of Austria and his rival king, King Louis IV the Bavarian, at Mühldorf in 1322. Third, the style of the miniatures is connected to the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Thus, the manuscript was produced around 1322.

Who ordered the prayer book and who was its illuminator? These questions cannot be answered based on the available data. The only clear name is

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[10] The main text was written in Ashkenazi square script, while the commentaries are in cursive on the outer margins.

[11] Bezalel Narkiss, "A Tripartite Illuminated Mahzor from a South German School of Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts around 1300," in *Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies Papers*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1968), 131.

[12] A certain scribe Hayyim (ח"ם סופר) also copied the so-called Schocken Bible (Southern Germany, c.1300; Jerusalem, Schocken Library, Ms.14840) and two close stylistic relatives of the Tripartite Mahzor: the Pentateuch of the Duke of Sussex (Southern Germany,1300; London, British Library, Add. Ms 15282) and the Sefer Mitzvot Katan (Lake Constance Region, c.1310; Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Heb. 75).

[13] Sarit Shalev-Eyni, "In the Days of the Barley Harvest: The Iconography of Ruth," *Artibus et Historiae* 26, no. 51 (2005): 38.

[14] Narkiss, "A Tripartite Illuminated Mahzor," 130.

[15] Rabbi Meir is mentioned in the Budapest volume, fol. 99v, the London volume, fol. 83, and the Oxford volume, fol. 194; Narkiss, "A Tripartite Illuminated Mahzor," 131.

that of the scribe. However, some general conclusions may be drawn from the content and layout of the codex. It contains piyyuts, which were cited by the *hazzan*.[16] The manuscript is quite large and richly decorated, so it was not only a prayer book, but must also have had a representative role. This leads to the person of the patron. He could have been a *hazzan* or a rich member of the community who donated the book. In any case, he must have been familiar with the Christian custom of self-representation by means of book illumination.

Regarding the style of the images, their painter could have been either a Jew or a Christian. The discussion of this topic would lead far from the purpose of this study; therefore, I will follow Marc Epstein who does not consider the origin of the illustrator a central question: "…it is clear that medieval Jewish art is Jewish not because it was produced by Jews, but because it was produced for Jews – Jewish patron and Jewish audience."[17]

The Mahzor is richly illuminated. In the first volume there are thirteen initial-words,[18] ten images of the zodiac and the Labors of the Months in double medallions wedged in the text, and several marginal decorations. In the second volume there are eight initial-words and a zodiac cycle in medallions (without the Labors of the Months). In the third volume there are nine initial-words. The initial-words are adorned with geometric motifs, troops of animals and hybrids, non-biblical scenes, and in five cases with biblical narratives. The scenes are often divided by trees and bushes. In most cases the illustrations of the piyyuts follow a traditional iconography, which was already established in the thirteenth century.[19]

Zoocephalic figures appear in five initial-words: four biblical scenes, one illustration connected to the content of the piyyut for Sukkot; and in two images of the zodiac cycles. All of them are found in the first and the second volumes:

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[16] The *hazzan* is the precentor who intones the liturgy and leads the prayers in the synagogue (Hyman Kublin and Akiva Zimmerman, "Hazzan," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. CD-ROM Edition, Version 1.0 [Jerusalem: Judaica Multimedia, 1997]).

[17] Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literatur*e (State College, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 7. Many scholars have discussed the question of the painters of Hebrew illuminated manuscripts. See, for instance, Jacob Leveen, *The Hebrew Bible in Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), 85; Franz Landsberger, "The Illumination of Hebrew Manuscripts in Middle Ages and Renaissance," in *An Illustrated History*, ed. Cecil Roth (Tel Aviv: Massadah, 1961), 415-421; Meyer Schapiro, "Introduction," in *The Bird's Head Haggadah*, 16; Gavin I. Langmuir, "The Tortures of the Body of Christ," in *Christendom and Its Discontent,* ed. Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 297; Ruth Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs,* especially 15-18; Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Jewish Art and Non-Jewish Culture: The Dynamics of Artistic Borrowing in Medieval Hebrew Manuscript Illumination," *Jewish History* 15 (2001): 188-189.

[18] This kind of decoration follows the Latin initial; however, since Hebrew letters do not have capital or non-capital versions, the decoration surrounds the entire first word framed within a panel.

[19] George Braziller, *Buchmalerei in Hebräischen Handschriften* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1978), 22-23.

two initial-words and one zodiac sign in the first volume, and three initial-words and one zodiac sign in the second. In most cases, it is impossible to identify the genera of the animal heads, one can only ascertain that it is a head of a mammal or a bird. The third volume does not depict human figures at all, either with normal or with animal heads.

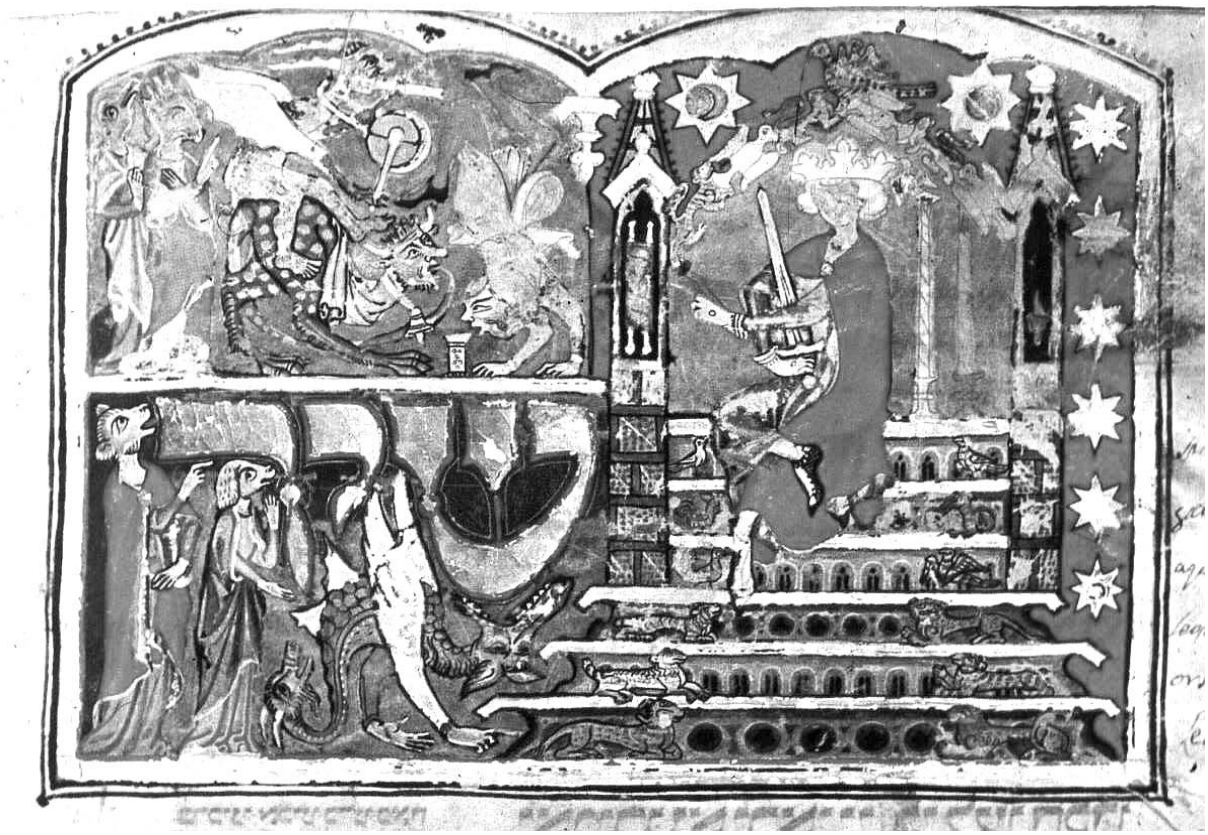

Fig. 1: Tripartite Mahzor: The Throne of Solomon.

The miniature connected to the Song of Songs as part of the Pesah liturgy does not illustrate the text, but represents its author, King Solomon sitting on his throne (fig. 1).[20] Solomon is represented as a judge and as the greatest earthly ruler. The two scenes on the left side of the image are quite obscure. The upper scene with two zoocephalic women is usually identified with "The Visit of the Queen of Sheba."[21] The lower scene is considered the "Judgment of Solomon," when two women quarreled over a baby (fig. 2). The two animal-headed women are identified as the two mothers. The one in the corner has a bear head, the other also seems to be a mammal, but it is hard to determine its genus. Their

[20] Volume 1, fol. 183v.

[21] István Ormos, *Kaufmann Dávid és gyűjteménye,* Különnyomat az *Örökségünk, Élő Múltunk. Gyűjtemények a Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtárában* című kötetből (Dávid Kaufmann and his Collection. Extract from *Our Heritage, Our Living Past. Collections in the Library of the Academy of Sciences*), (Budapest: MTA Könyvtára, 2001), 252.

gestures suggest a quarrel, but the image does not portray the baby, who is certainly the central element of this iconographic type.

Fig. 2: Tripartite Mahzor: the women of the Judgment of Solomon (detail).

The scene of "Crossing the Reed Sea"[22] decorates the piyyut connected to the seventh day of Pesah. On the upper part of the image, the Israelites are walking towards the sea, while on the lower register one can see the march and the demise of the Egyptian army. Moses, who is already standing by the seashore, lifts his stick up over the water. Behind him the Israelites are coming, divided into two groups. The group of men is first, with Aaron at its head. They have human faces, wear long robes and cloaks, and have pointed hats. Only Aaron and Moses wear different hats; Aaron's hat resembles the mitre of a Christian bishop. The men's group is followed by women (fig. 3). They are dressed in long clothes that cover their entire bodies. They have animal heads reminiscent of mammals, but it is impossible to define what kind of animals they are. There are cat-like and horse-like heads. These faces are in better condition than those of the men. Each woman wears a kerchief and holds a human-faced baby in her arms. Their leader, Miriam, does not wear any headgear. She beats a drum, while the other women sing and clap. The Egyptian army fills the lower register

[22] Vol. 1, fol. 197r. The exact translation of the Hebrew expression "Yam haSuf" is Reed Sea.

of the panel. They wear chain mails and helmets, but their faces are visible: all have normal human faces.

Fig. 3: Tripartite Mahzor: The Crossing of the Reed Sea
(detail: the groups of the Israelite men and women).

The "Receiving of the Torah" is depicted at the beginning of the piyyut on the first day of Shavuot.[23] The arrangement of the Israelites is akin to that in the "Crossing the Reed Sea:" Moses followed by Aaron and the group of men, and finally a group of women closing the procession. All the men have human faces, wear pointed hats, and long clothes. The women appear with animal heads, four have mammal-like faces, and one has a bird-head, but their exact genera cannot be ascertained. All of them wear white kerchiefs and long clothes, which entirely hide their legs.

Fig. 4: Receiving the Torah (detail: the groups of Israelite men and women).

[23] Vol. 2, fol. 3r.

Fig. 5: The story of Ruth (details: Ruth reaping the grain, Ruth collecting the grain, Ruth declaring her faith in Naomi's God).

The Book of Ruth, as part of the Shavuot liturgy, is illustrated with harvesting scenes.[24] Four people appear with animal heads and four with human heads. No consensus could be found concerning their identification.[25] Following the most recent argumentation of Shalev-Eyni, the figure in the right corner is Ruth declaring "her faith in Naomi's God by raising her hands (Ruth 1.16);"[26] the hawk-headed woman is Ruth collecting grain; and the woman in the red cloak under the tree is Ruth reaping the grain (fig. 5). On the other side of the tree Boaz gives the six measures of barley to Ruth. Shalev-Eyni supported her attribution with other illustrations from the text which depict the same scenes, and where the identification of the figures is more unequivocal.

The manuscripts contain a number of exceptions to the rule, that is, zoocephalic males and human-headed females. The illustration of Sukkot[27] shows a bird-headed figure on the left side of the first word. In all likelihood the figure is male: First, because he holds an *etrog* in his right hand, and a *lulav* in his left hand. These plants are used in the ritual on the feast of Sukkot and are practically always held by men; second, his legs can be seen, and he has neither hair nor a kerchief.

[24] Vol. 2, fol. 71r.
[25] See Ameisenowa, "Animal-headed Gods," 31; Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs*, 31; Shalev-Eyni, "Barley Harvest," 38.
[26] Shalev-Eyni, "Barley Harvest," 38.
[27] Vol. 2, fol. 85r.

The zodiac sign of Gemini in the first volume represents two animal-headed figures standing in a medallion (fig. 6).[28] Both are males, since the dress they wear covers their body only to the calf. Their genera cannot be identified with assurance. The figure on the left with a long nose and big, round ears looks like a bear. His fellow, who wears some headgear or has long, hanging ears, is also a mammal. Their faces are reminiscent of the heads of the two mothers in "The Throne of Solomon." In the medallion to the left, the month of Nisan is represented. It contains a crowned human-headed figure who sits in the foliage of a blossoming tree and holds a bird, probably a falcon. According to Julius von Schlosser, the figure represents *Frau Minne*, the woman who embodied the idealized lover of German courtly poetry. Bezalel Narkiss and Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, however, considered him a falconer, a symbol of the labor of Nisan.[29]

Fig. 6: Tripartite Mahzor, vol. 1: The Gemini.

The Gemini in the second volume[30] are similar to the Gemini in the first one. They are two animal-headed men wearing short robes and standing in the medallion. However, these individuals have bird heads instead of mammal heads and do not hold anything.

[28] Vol. 1, fol. 143r.

[29] David Heinrich Müller and Julius von Schlosser, "Die Bilderhaggaden der europäischen Sammlungen," in iidem*, Die Haggadah von Sarajevo. Eine spanisch-jüdische Bilderhandschrift des Mittelalters* (Vienna: Hölder, 1898), 117; Ormos, *Kaufmann Dávid*, 247; Bezalel Narkiss and Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *Index of Jewish Art. Iconographical Index of Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts 4. Illuminated Manuscripts of the Kaufmann Collection* (Budapest: The Library of the Hungarian Academy of Science, 1988), volume 1, card no. 13.

[30] Vol. 2, fol. 139r.

Fig. 7: Tripartite Mahzor, vol. 1: Virgo.

The zodiac sign of Virgo in the first volume shows her as a young lady with a human face and long blond hair (fig. 7).[31] Virgo in the second volume is also a human-headed girl.[32] In the medallion to the left two figures, representing the month Elul, are shown working. A young lady in a blue robe is cutting grain with a sickle. She has a human face; her long blond hair is covered by a hat.

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The Tripartite Mahzor is usually described as a manuscript where all the men have human heads and all the women animal heads.[33] Although there is such a pattern, the distinction is not as consistent as the description suggests. The statement is true for the biblical scenes "Crossing the Reed Sea," "Receiving the Torah," "The Throne of Solomon," and "The Book of Ruth," but there are also apparent exceptions that pertain to the signs of the zodiac and the Labors of the Months.

In spite of these exceptions the Tripartite Mahzor tends to use the zoocephalic motif with the aim of distinguishing male and female figures. In two of the biblical scenes, the gender distinction is strengthened by the compositional arrangement placing women and men in separate groups. The two other biblical scenes not only depict an anonymous group of women, but concrete biblical heroines. As for the genera of the animals, in most cases they can hardly be determined. One can only note that a figure has a bird head or a mammal head,

[31] Vol. 1, fol. 144r.
[32] Shalev-Eyni, "Ha-mahzor ha-meshullash," 99.
[33] Bezalel Narkiss, "Mahzor," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*; idem, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*, 106; Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs*, 37-38.

although there are some faces that are reminiscent of a bear or a cat, others a horse or an ass. The genera of the animal heads are not specified according to gender or status: males and females get the same types of head. For example, the two mothers in the left side of "The Throne of Solomon" have similar faces to the Gemini in the same volume. The female figures in the "Crossing the Reed Sea" and in "Receiving the Torah" have all kinds of heads, bear- or cat-like, horse- or ass-like, and a bird head. The faces of the Queen of Sheba, of the two quarrelling mothers and of Ruth do not have features of concrete genera. This suggests that the genus of the animals was not a significant factor. The animal heads were not meant to mirror the characteristics of a biblical figure, but primarily to hide human, more exactly female faces.

This leads to the main question: Why was it necessary to hide female faces? Which concepts may have lain in the background of this gender distinction?

Seeing an object or a person can be as bad as committing a sin, since seeing is often just the first step toward sinning. In Jewish tradition sight and two very serious sins, idolatry and adultery, are strongly connected ideas.[34] Both represent unfaithfulness or breaking an alliance, and the sense of sight plays a central role in their commission. One can find numerous examples of this connection in the Bible as well as in the rabbinical literature:[35]

> It (the cord) shall serve you as a fringe, and when you see it, you will be reminded of all of YHWH's commandments and perform them. Then **you will not be drawn after** (*zonim* from the verb *zana*, that is, commit fornication with) **your heart and your eyes**, which you follow so faithlessly![36]

The *Talmud Bavli* interprets Numbers 15.39 in the following way:

> 'After your own heart' – this is the *minut*, as he says 'The fool has said in his heart, There is no God' (Ps.14.1); 'after your own eyes'–this refers to yearning for transgression, as it is written, 'And Samson said to his father, Get her for me, for she is pleasing in my eyes' (Jud.14.3).[37]

Texts of the Hasidei Ashkenaz seem to be especially fascinating concerning the images of the Mahzor, because they originated in southern Germany—the same area, where the manuscript was produced, and about one hundred years earlier.[38]

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[34] Turán, *Képfogyatkozás*, 20-31. In the first subchapter he points out the close relationship between two of the Ten Commandments. These two are the prohibition of idolatry (Ex. 20.3) and the prohibition of adultery (Ex. 20.13-14).

[35] Ibidem, esp. 26-31.

[36] Num. 15.39 (my emphasis). The translation is from *The Anchor Bible. Numbers 1-20. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary by Baruch A. Levine* (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

[37] Talmud Bavli, Berachot 12b. The translation is from *The Talmud of Babylonia. An American Translation* I: *Tractate Berachot,* trans. Jacob Neusner (Chico, CA: Scholar Press, 1984), 101.

[38] The Hasidei Ashkenaz represent one of the most significant phenomena in the medieval history of German Jewry. Studies devoted to this group describe it in different ways. Ivan Marcus provided a systematic survey of older literature about them (*Piety and Society. The*

The *Sefer Hasidim*, the main ethical work of the Hasidei Ashkenaz, refers to the negative aspects of seeing, and mentions the face which is proper to attract someone else's eyes attention:[39]

> The angels are glad when the soul is harmonious with them, namely that we would be on earth, we would be like this soul, which has been with us and went down to dwell on earth. And because the soul is on high he has made a body in the likeness of '*Elohim*[40] and created it in the image of '*Elohim*. As long as someone **does not transgress, and does not enjoy whatever his eyes see**, on high the angels of mercy and angels of peace are similar to the righteous; and if someone **does not embellish his face so that people would desire him**, and is careful not to ruminate [sexually] in the thought of his heart then He causes the brilliance to fall on the face of that [entity] which has been made on high in their likeness. And so long as those faces are luminous, no demonic power is able to harm him. And it is said[41] 'He was similar to an animal, become like [them].' And our sages have said[42] that 'No beast or demonic power can

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Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany [Leiden: Brill, 1981], 1-10). Only a few certain historical data are known about them. The most prominent figures – R. Samuel ben Kalonymus he-Hasid of Speyer, his son, R. Judah ben Samuel he-Hasid of Regensburg, and Judah's student, R. Eleazar ben Judah of Worms – came from the famous Kalonymus family, whose forefather, Moshe Kalonymus, immigrated to Mainz from Lucca in the ninth century. The family played an important role as community leaders in the German-Jewish Middle Ages. They created a movement which had its first centers in the cities of Speyer, Worms, Mainz, and Regensburg, and then extended its influence in most of Germany and in some parts of France (Joseph Dan, "Hasidei Ashkenaz," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*). Peter Schäfer put the productive period of the Hasidei Ashkenaz, that is, their literary activity, between c. 1150 and 1250 (Peter Schäfer, "The Ideal of Piety of the Ashkenazi Hasidim and Its Roots in Jewish Tradition," *Jewish History* 4, no. 2 [1990]: 9).

[39] The *Sefer Hasidim* can be hardly considered a single book; it is rather different text collections under the same title. It has two main versions, the Parma manuscript from the mid-thirteenth century from Germany and a shorter version printed in Bologna in 1538 (Yehuda he-Hasid, *Sefer Hasidim al pi nosah ketav yad asher be-Parma* [Sefer Hasidim according to the Parma ms.], ed. J. Wistinetzki [Jerusalem: Vegsel, 1998]; idem, *Sefer Hasidim* [Bologna edition], ed. Reuven Margaliot [Jerusalem: Harav Kook, 2004]). According to recent investigations the Parma ms. was composed before 1220-1230, probably in southern Germany. The Bologna version was probably composed in the second half of the thirteenth century. For the redaction of the different versions and for their structure see Susanne Borchers, *Jüdisches Frauenleben im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), 13-18. The authorship of the work is debated. Following the argumentation of Ivan Marcus, the first part of the Parma manuscript, the *Sefer ha-Yirah,* was written by Samuel ben Kalonymus he-Hasid, and the other parts of the *Sefer Hasidim* by Judah ben Samuel he-Hasid. According to this theory, Eleazar did not contribute to the *Sefer Hasidim*; moreover, the different views of Judah and Eleazar can be discovered by comparing their writings.

[40] '*Elohim* means God.

[41] Psalms 49.13.

[42] Talmud Bavli Shabbat, fol. 151b.

> have a power over man, until he becomes like an animal,' namely an animal like it is. And this is [the meaning of] what has been said 'The image has been removed from them.'[43] However, when someone sins and is enjoying his transgressions, then the faces of the pernicious angels are delighted because of them [the sins] and the faces of anger are in front of them and smoke is [dwelling] on them. And the faces that are in the likeness of the righteous are like the faces [found] in the front of the faces standing before the Glory, as the gladness is there.[44]

This passage contains two important statements: Enjoying whatever one sees is a transgression; causing this joy, or even desire, in someone else by adorning the face is also a sin; that is, both the act of seeing and being the object of seeing can lead to sin.

One's heart and eyes are the two main assistants of sin. However, it is not simply the act of seeing that carries danger for the seer. Certain things, objects of seeing increase the danger of committing sin by being very seductive. Such an object is a woman. Women are dangerous as seers and as seen objects. The gaze of a woman can bewitch a man, who then easily commits a sin; while seeing a woman can generate sinful desire in the heart and, in this way, leads to the same result.[45] The second case is of more relevance here since the main topic is the depiction of women in a book, that is, women as objects of gazing.

The tradition of limiting communication with women is already present in the *Mishnah*: "Do not engage in too much conversation with women."[46] As the *Sefer Hasidim* attests, this opinion was prevalent among the Hasidei Ashkenaz. The *Sefer Hasidim* depicts women in different ways.[47] It emphasizes the importance of a happy marriage, yet, women, even the pious ones, are also able to lead men to sin. A hasid should marry a woman in order to prevent himself from sexual sins. If someone lives in a happy marriage, he would not desire other women. "Good marital relations mean an essential fence against the possibility of sexual temptation elsewhere."[48] However, some statements of the Hasidei Ashkenaz are much stricter. According to them one should be careful even with one's own wife and limit his conversation with her only to the time of sexual intercourse. "And one should talk with his wife only in the time of the event."[49] But this "fence" is certainly not enough. A man should not look at women lest

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[43] Numbers 14.9.

[44] Sefer Hasidim, Bologna edition (hereafter SHB) §1136 (my emphasis). The translation is from Idel, "Gazing at the Head," 281-282.

[45] Turán, *Képfogyatkozás*, 81-84.

[46] *Mishnah* Avot 1.5. The translation is from Simon G. Kramer, *God and Man in the Sefer Hasidim* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1966), 120, note 82.

[47] Judith Baskin, "From Separation to Displacement: The Problem of Women in Sefer Hasidim," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1994): 1-18.

[48] Ibidem, 3.

[49] SHB §29. Similar passages are Sefer Hasidim, Parma ms (hereafter SHP) §984, §989. See Baskin, "Separation," 3.

sinful thoughts emerge in his heart. Both of these two warnings appear in statements of Eleazar of Worms, "One should avoid looking at other women, and have sex with one's wife with the greatest passion because she guards him from sin."[50] A man's attitude towards women can influence other people's judgement about him and can make him be considered unreliable:

> You should not hire a worker or a teacher who gazes at women if he does not have to speak to them, or who talks to woman if it is not essential. **The law is that a man should not gaze at a woman** unless he has to speak to her, so that he should not lust after her, as it says '[The Torah] will keep you from an evil woman, from the smooth tongue of a forbidden woman. Do not lust for her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyelids.'(Proverbs 6.24-25)[51]

The aim of this prohibition is not simply to avoid sexual desires and sins, but to concentrate on another, superior direction:

> The main strength of the pious man from beginning to end is that although they mock him he does not forsake his piety; **his intent is for heaven's sake and he does not look at the countenance of women**: especially so among other men where women are customarily seen, for example, if he has been in the wedding hall where the women were garbed in choicest ornaments…. And **he does not gaze upon women** at the time when they stand by their wash. When they wash their garments and lift their skirts so as not to soil them, they uncover their legs, and we know a woman's leg is a sexual incitement and so said the sage,[52] 'Nothing interposes better before desire, than closing one's eyes.'[53]

These ideas concerning women seem to be similar to the handling of female figures in the Tripartite Mahzor. Were these figures deformed in order to hide their real countenance which would carry great danger for the male reader? It is a possible interpretation for the zoocephalic motif in the Tripartite Mahzor.

Still, it is necessary to emphasize that no direct relationship between the images and the writings of the Hasidei Ashkenaz can be proved. There are several reasons for this. First, the circumstances of the production of the Mahzor are not known. The determination of its date of production is based on indirect evidence such as the style of its illumination and the mention of the already deceased Rabbi Meir von Rothenburg. Neither the patron nor the painter of the Mahzor

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[50] Sefer ha-Roqeah ha-Gadol, Hilkhot Teshuvah no. 20, Jerusalem, 1968, 30; quoted in Baskin, "Separation," 3.

[51] SHB §1000 (my emphasis). The translation is from Avraham Yaakov Finkel, *Sefer Chasidim. The Book of the Pious by Rabbi Yehudah HeChasid* (Northvale: Iason Aronson Inc., 1997), 217.

[52] *Talmud Yerushalmi* Berachot 1:5.

[53] SHB §9 (my emphasis). It is almost the same as SHP §978. The translation is from Baskin, "Rereading the Sources: New Visions of Women in Medieval Ashkenaz," in *Textures and Meanings: Thirty Years of Judaic Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst,* ed. Leonard H. Ehrlich, Shmuel Bolozky, Robert A. Rothstein, Murray Schwartz, Jay R. Berkovitz, James E. Young (www.umass.edu/judaic/ anniversaryvolume/) 299.

are known. Second, the Hasidei Ashkenaz and its literary activity is also not an unequivocal phenomenon. There is no scholarly consensus concerning the nature of this movement and its influence on wider Jewish society. Moreover, the *Sefer Hasidim* has several different versions. It is impossible to determine which version was distributed in which region. Therefore, it would be difficult to pinpoint a direct relationship between the Tripartite Mahzor and the *Sefer Hasidim*.

Besides revealing the network of concepts and beliefs from which the Mahzor originated, the comparative investigation of the zoocephalic motif in other manuscripts may strengthen or weaken the plausibility of the interpretation. What was the function of the animal heads in the other manuscripts? Why were normal human faces changed for animal ones and what kind of animals are they?

* * *

The Tripartite Mahzor is not the only manuscript that contains animal-headed human figures. This motif appears in several other Ashkenazi manuscripts. Bezalel Narkiss drew up a list of the most important manuscripts, including not only codices where animal headed figures appear, but also those which do not depict zoocephalic figures, but distort the human face in several other ways.[54] The list is certainly not exhaustive. The lack of a complete list makes the study of the phenomenon more difficult. I have selected those items from Narkiss' list that contain animal-headed figures, and I have attempted to collect more (see Appendix). All the manuscripts noted were produced in Germany, mostly in southern Germany and Franconia, from the second third of the thirteenth century to the mid-fourteenth century. There are eight mahzors, a Bible and a Haggadah.

On the basis of the images that were available to me, I can state that these manuscripts applied animal heads and other distortions of the human figure in various ways, and none of them used exclusively one technique. However, they have one common feature: zoocephalic figures in them should be considered humans, and they behave as humans. In this way, their animal heads can be regarded as masks, which cover their original faces. Comparing the manuscripts, three main questions arise:

- Which animals are used to substitute human faces?
- Which figures are depicted with such faces and which are not? Are there any differences?
- What kind of images are they: narrative or other decorative ones?

[54] *Machsor Lipsiae,* ed. Elias Katz. Hanau/Main: Dausien Verlag, 1964, 104-105.

Fig. 8: Worms Mahzor, vol. 1, fol. 111r (detail).

One of the early examples is the *Worms Mahzor* (1272, Franconia).[55] Most of the images that it contains are illustrations of piyyuts and follow a traditional iconography developed among the thirteenth-century Ashkenaz. In the first volume most figures are depicted with semi-bird heads (fig. 8). They have long, pointed, usually opened beaks, which are more emphasized since they are depicted in profile. Besides this animal feature, the figures have hair, and in many cases a beard and hat, usually a pointed one. Almost all the figures are represented with a semi-bird head, but there are several exceptions. On vol. 1, fol. 19r, Haman and his ten sons are hanging from a high tree. According to Narkiss, their faces are hidden by their hair, but it seems more probable that they are depicted from the back which is why one can see only their hair and their hands bound together.[56] At the beginning of the Shabbat Parah, Eleazar ha-Kohen appears with a human face (vol. 1, fol. 21r). At the beginning of the Shabbat ha-Gadol, just as in most of the mahzors, a couple is depicted (vol. 1, fol. 34v). The bridegroom has a human face. His long, wavy hair appears from under a pointed hat, he has small eyes and a dot-like nose. The bride's body and head, however,

[55] *Worms Mahzor: the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem MS. Heb. 4°781/1,* ed. Malachi Beit-Arie (Vaduz: Cyelar Establishment and Jerusalem: JNUL of the Hebrew University; London Cyelar, 1985). The mahzor consists of two volumes, but they were probably not produced by the same scribe. They were joined together some time later for the great synagogue in Worms. All the images are in the first volume. See *Worms Mahzor*, 13-14.

[56] Bezalel Narkiss, "Worms Mahzor," in *Worms Mahzor* 82. The *Leipzig Mahzor* (vol.1, fol. 51v) has a similar depiction, where Haman and his sons are hanging from the tree and their hands, except for Haman's, are bound together at the back.

are wrapped in a loose cloak; she is almost invisible. The last exception is the hunter on vol. 1, fol. 170v. There, at the beginning of the piyyut "A loving doe, a gift of Sinai" one can see a hunting scene. This is the ordinary way to illustrate the piyyut in Ashkenaz mahzors.[57] The illuminator of the Worms Mahzor painted the hunter with a dog-like head. In some cases the images are damaged or some parts are missing. On the last day of Pesah, next to the word "and my scribes," a small figure stands on the inner margin holding a table with names: "Judah ha-sofer me-Nurnberq Simhah ha-sofer Semayah ha-tzarf[ati]."[58] His face is damaged; perhaps it was erased sometime later. On fol. 48v and fol. 111r, the tops of the pages are cut, and the upper parts of the illustrations are missing, together with the upper parts of some human figures. Although the remaining figures have bird heads, it is impossible to decide what kind of heads the upper ones had. Regarding gender, two apparently female figures appear in the Worms Mahzor. One is the bride at the beginning of Shabbat ha-Gadol, whose body as well as her face are covered by a cloak. The other is Virgo in the zodiac cycle who has a long beak, similarly to the male figures wearing pointed hats, and a bonnet on her head (vol. 1, fol.58v). The sign of Gemini is represented by two men; both have beaks and hair (vol. 1, fol. 58r).

The evil characters did not receive the same faces like the Israelites. Haman and his sons are portrayed from the rear, while the evil hunter appears with a dog's or wolf's face. Hunting scenes in a Jewish context usually symbolize the fate of Israel: the hunter, who is the oppressor of the nation of God, is chasing after the deer, the symbol of the Israelites.

In the Bird's Head Haggadah (c.1300, Franconia) the images partly represent biblical narratives, which do not connect to the text directly, and partly ritual illustrations closely connected with the text. Most of the Jews have animal heads. Their faces are equipped with long, curved, mostly closed beaks (fig. 9). Nevertheless, most have sharp mammal-like ears, human hair, and often beards. Two of the Jews are depicted with long, thick, curved noses instead of sharp beaks. Both of them seem to be servants (fols. 7v, 28r). In contrast with the Jews, non-Jews are represented with human heads. On folio 24v, the Egyptians are chasing the Israelites. At the head of the army a soldier is riding with a flag in his hand. After him comes Pharaoh, also on horseback. The features of their faces are quite dim, but they are round with no trace of beaks. Their heads are protected by leather helmets.[59] Both figures wear chain-mail, partially covered

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[57] For instance, Tripartite Mahzor, vol. 2, fol.49r. For more examples see Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion*, 128, note 23. He discusses the Jewish iconography of hunting in the same book (chapter 2: The Elusive Hare: Constructing Identity, 16-38).

[58] Vol. 1, fol. 95r. According to Narkiss, "Worms Mahzor", 79-89, Judah was the father of the scribe, Simhah was the scribe of the *Worms Mahzor*, and Semayah was probably its artist (ibidem, 86). In any case, is it possible that the small figure represents the scribe of the manuscript?

[59] H. L. C. Jaffé states that the helmets cover the entire faces, with openings for mouth, eyes and nose (Jaffé, "The Illustrations," in *The Bird's Head Haggadah*, 38). Ruth Mellinkoff

by cloaks. They are followed by two bird-headed figures; one is on foot, the other on horseback. They do not wear armor or helmets, their cloaks and shoes resemble those of the Jews who are carrying the dough on the next page. Who are they? Do they belong to the Egyptian army or are they the laggards of Israel? This is an important question, since if they were Jews there would be a clear distinction in the depiction of Jews and non-Jews in the Haggadah. I did not find any story in Jewish tradition that could explain the two Jews among the Egyptians. Moreover, the horse on which one of the bird-headed figures is sitting seems to be drawing the chariot. Nevertheless, their clothes, shoes, and heads suggest that they belong to the Israelites.[60] The other figures who do not have bird-heads are the angels (fol. 33r). Their faces are round, without long beaks. The features of their faces are as dim as those of the Egyptians. According to Narkiss, their original faces were erased, and then new ones were drawn by a later hand.[61] Their faces may originally have been blank. There are several women in the images, and they have the same bird heads as the men (e. g., on fol. 25v).

Fig. 9: Bird's Head Haggadah, fol. 22r: Bird headed Jews.

points out that the differences between Jews and Egyptians are clear on this image; however, although she considers the two bird-headed figures Egyptian soldiers, she does not seek an explanation for their features (Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs*, 20 and 25).

[60] Jaffé considers them Egyptians (*Bird's Head Haggadah*, 38), while Cecil Roth is convinced, that they "are intended to represent Israelite or angelic fifth columnists." See C. Roth, "Bird's Heads and Graven Images," *Commentary* 6 (1969): 82-83.

[61] Narkiss, *Bird's Head Haggadah*, 25.

Fig. 10: Bird's Head Haggadah, fol. 24r: The army of the Egyptians and two Israelites.

A great many of the images of the *Leipzig Mahzor* (c. 1320, southwest Germany) are narrative, biblical or ritual illustrations related to the text. The figures have sort of bird-heads (fig. 11). This designation is probably not accurate, since they do not resemble the heads in the Bird's Head Haggadah, the Worms Mahzor or the Laud Mahzor.[62] These figures do not have long, sharp beaks; their faces are round. The same curved line marks the nose and the mouth, and the eyebrow is pulled up. On this account, the faces are strongly deformed, but not unambiguously, bird heads. Probably the painter primarily just wanted to distort the figures' countenance from the normal. In any case, these deformed-face people have hair, sometimes also beards, and they wear pointed hats or hairnets. There are two exceptions: the Egyptian soldiers (vol. 1, fol.72v) and the sign of Gemini (vol. 1, fol. 85v). In both cases, the figures' heads are entirely covered by helmets. Apart from the Egyptians, other non-Jews in the Mahzor (King Nimrod [vol. 2, fol. 164v] and Haman and his sons, as well as Haman's daughter [vol.1, fol.51v]) have the same heads as the Jews. One cannot discover any difference between the depiction of males and females. Both have the same strange faces. Women wear long dresses with only the corners of their shoes visible. They are bare-headed or wear hair nets.

[62] *Laud Mahzor*, c.1260, Oxford, Bodley Library, Ms. Laud Or. 321.

Fig. 11: Leipzig Mahzor, vol. 1, fol. 64v: Illustration of the piyyut for Shabbat ha-Gadol.

The Ambrosian Bible is the earliest example where animal-headed figures appear. It was produced in Ulm in 1236-1238. Besides the animal-headed figures, the manuscript contains figures who are depicted from the rear or whose faces are blank. Since in several cases fragments of the features are still visible, the faces must have been erased later (for instance, B30, fol. 102r). The animal heads are very similar to those in the Tripartite Mahzor: human and animal features do not mix on these heads. In many cases they wear a crown, but do not have hair. Their genera can be determined a bit better than in the case of the Tripartite Mahzor. There are heads of birds and many kinds of mammals: lions, cows, donkeys, cats, and so forth. Both humans and heavenly creatures appear with animal heads. The Book of Ezekiel is adorned by the Beasts of Ezekiel's Vision (B31, fol. 136r). Three animal headed human figures, all with two big wings, and a normal lion appear under the first letters of the book. Among the winged creatures, there are two lions and an ox, but the eagle and the man are not portrayed at all. On "The Feast of the Righteous" (B32, fol. 136r; fig. 12) five crowned persons are standing around the table and two musicians are playing for them. Three figures at the table, in the middle, are noble animals: a lion, an eagle and a cat-like animal. They are surrounded by an ass on the left and an ox on the right. Both of them can be considered positive animals. The ox is a positive animal in the account of the vision of Ezekiel. As for the ass, although several bad associations are connected with it, in the story of Balaam it is a God-fearing creature. Moreover, in contrast with the horse, the animal of luxury and

war, the ass represents a life of work and peace.[63] The musician in the right corner has a bear-like head, the face of the other one in the left corner is damaged.

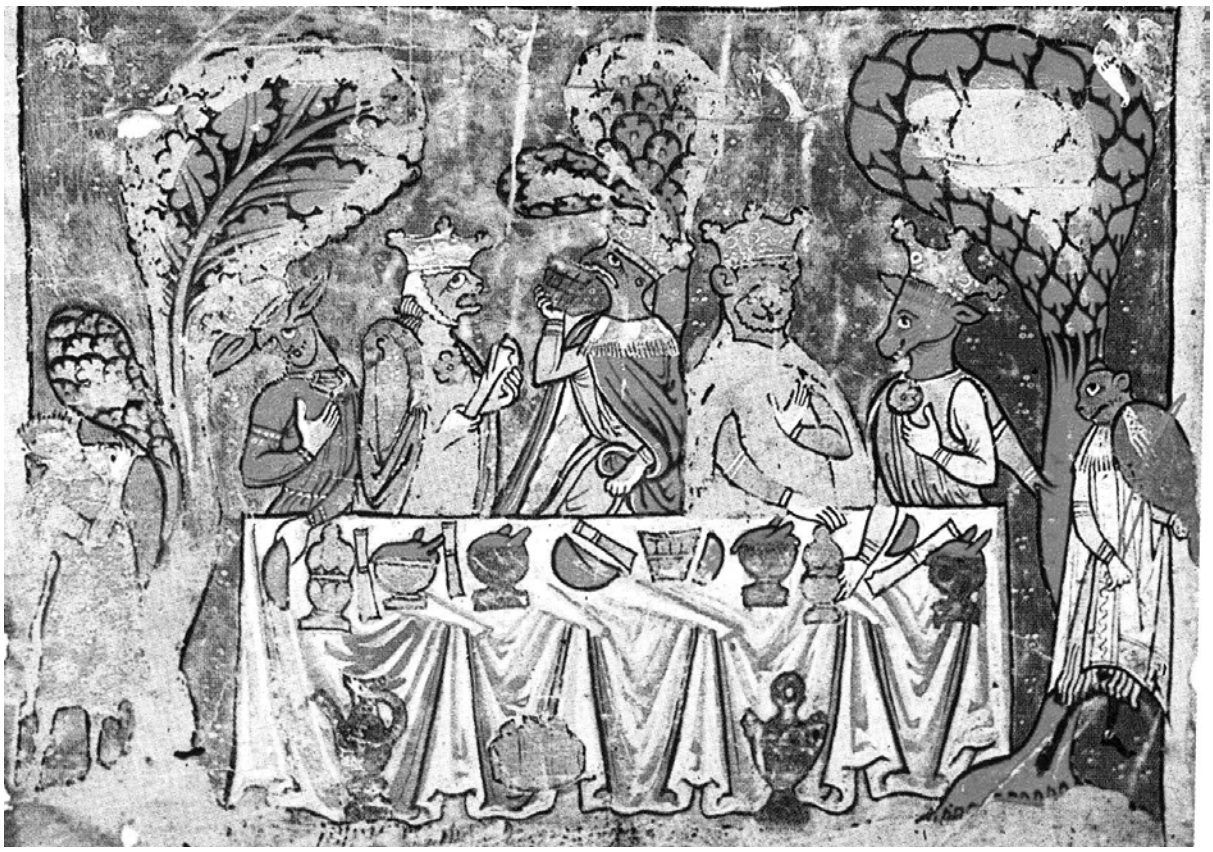

Fig. 12: Ambrosian Bible, fol. 136r: The Feast of the Righteous.

At the end of the Book of Ruth, one can see a prone figure with a crown on his head and another figure sitting next to the bed (B32, fol.2v). The face of the prone figure seems to have had a human face, but it was erased. This figure is certainly a man since he has a beard. The figure sitting next to him had an animal face, but the features were also erased. Only the pointed ear and the hairy jaw are visible. The Book of Ruth ends with a genealogy; its last words say that "Isai begat David." The picture certainly delineates the scene when Bethsabe, following the advice of Nathan, visited the old David and reminded him of his promise concerning Solomon (1Kg 1.15). Below this image, a bearded figure is lifting a horn filled with oil and a crowned figure is riding away on a donkey. The bearded man must be Zadok, the high priest, and the rider the new king, Solomon (1Kg 1.33 and 39). Their faces are erased. One would need to study the original manuscript to decide what kind of heads they originally had. There is an obviously female figure at the beginning of Genesis, where Adam and Eve

[63] For the different meanings of the ass, see Jehuda Feliks and David Niv, "Ass," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. The article quotes from the Talmud Bavli: "he who sees an ass in a dream should hope for salvation" (Ber. 56b).

surround the first word (B30, fol.1r). Both turn their backs to the reader so their faces cannot be seen, although they have normal human hair. The other certainly female figure, Bethsabe, is depicted with an animal face.

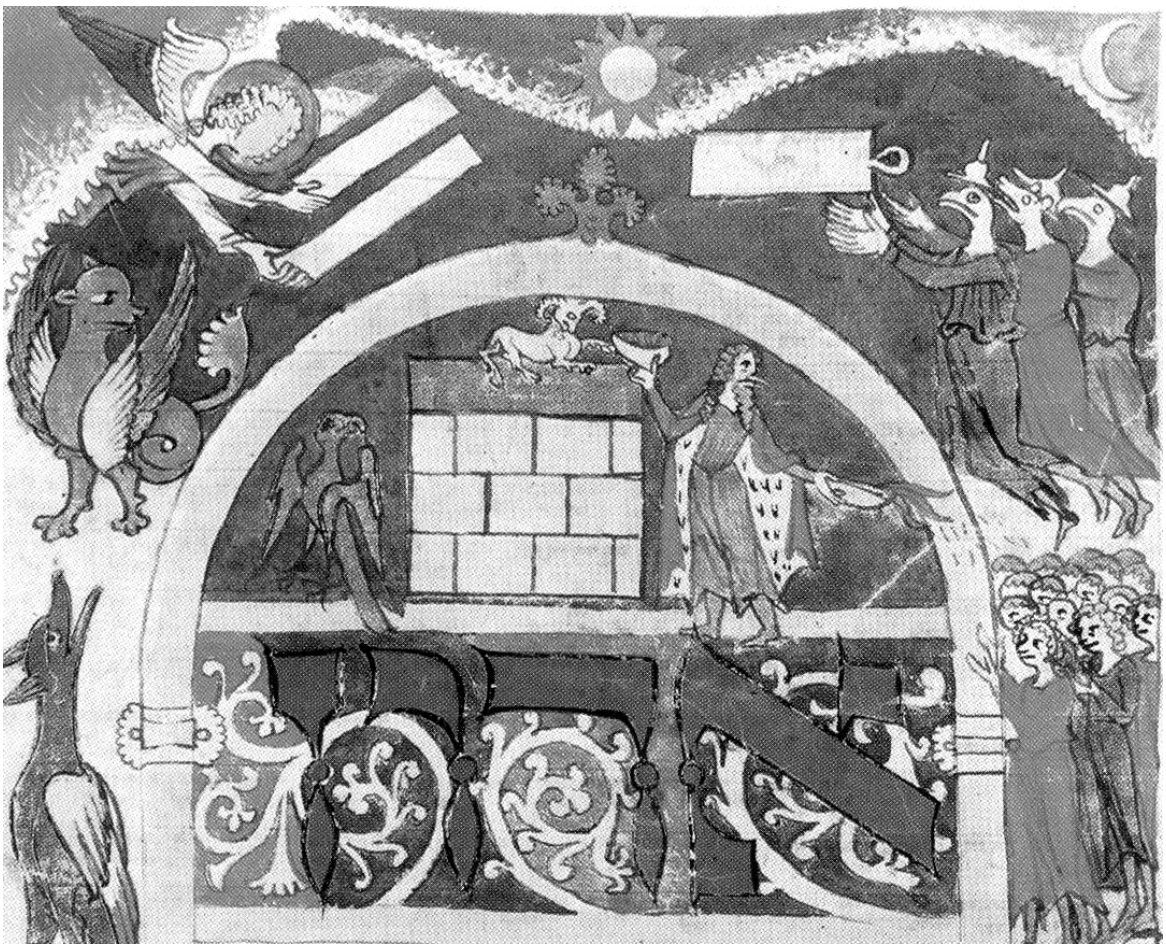

Fig. 13: Laud Mahzor, fol. 127v: illustration of the piyyut *Adon Imnani* for the first day of Shavuot (detail).

The *Laud Mahzor* (southern Germany, around 1260) uses different types of animal-headed figures and also human-headed ones. Animal and human features are mixed in many cases: people have pointed ears, animal-like cheeks and noses or beaks, but they have hair as well. A full-page image on folio 127v (fig. 13) shows different kinds of distortion. In the upper left corner, there is a blank faced angel holding the two tables of the Law. His face seems to be erased. In the upper right corner a doglike-headed and two bird-headed figures without hair are kneeling; they represent Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu.[64] In a lower register of the page, a bird-headed Moses with long hair sprinkles blood over the Israelites. The people have human heads, but according to Narkiss their faces were originally blank and the features are later additions.[65] The features of their faces

[64] About this image see Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, "Further Thoughts on an Early Illustrated Pentateuch," *Journal of Jewish Art* 10 (1984): 29-31.

[65] Narkiss, "Zoocephalic Phenomenon," 52; idem, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*, 94.

were painted with much darker ink than the outlines of their faces and their hair. The eyes of the animal-headed Aaron, Nadab and Abihu seem to have been painted with the same ink, just like the face of the figure with a long, pointed nose at the bottom of the page. Numerous initial-words in the Mahzor are surrounded by lion-headed or rather bear-headed (?) figures. On folio 48v one can see a couple, a queen and a king. Both have lion heads, curly hair, and crowns. There is no difference between the genders or between human beings and angels. On the Sacrifice of Isaac (fol. 184r), the angel who stops the rising hand of Abraham appears with an animal head. It is impossible to see any consistent application of the various heads. Moreover, the choice of the animal-heads does not seem to reflect the inner features of the figures.

The latest manuscript to be mentioned is the *Hammelburg Mahzor* (Hammelburg, Franconia, 1348). Like the others, it does not use animal heads exclusively. There are human-headed figures as well. These are especially interesting since they do not have eyes; only eyebrow-lines mark the place of them. Both males and females are represented in this way (fol. 65v, fol. 349v: a couple appears in both images). Mattathias, the High Priest, is depicted with a monster-like head (fol. 33r; fig. 14). It does not resemble any existing animal. On folio 187v a similar creature blows the shofar.

Fig. 14: Hammelburg Mahzor, fol. 33r: the High Priest Mattathias (detail).

As a summary, it may be concluded that in some cases, like in the Leipzig Mahzor, the main function of the zoocephalic motif may have been the avoidance of displaying any human faces. In the Bird's Head Haggadah or in the Tripartite Mahzor, however, where not every figure has an animal-head, the motif can be interpreted as a distinctive element for certain groups.

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As the analyzed manuscripts testify, the zoocephalic motif was a well-known regional method of covering the human face. It occurs in at least ten thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Ashkenazi manuscripts. Generally speaking, their zoocephalic figures should be seen as human beings. The genus of the animal heads did not have great importance – except probably in the *Ambrosian Bible* – for it was not designed to express the inner features of the characters. The change of heads is rather due to an intention to hide the original faces for different reasons. A close investigation of their images reveals the differences in the use of the motif. On the basis of these differences one can set up three categories:

- It was used together with other methods of covering the human face: Leipzig Mahzor, Hammelburg Mahzor.
- It appears in the company of normal human faces, at least in their recent form: Worms Mahzor, Bird's Head Haggadah, Tripartite Mahzor.
- It was applied together with faces covered in other ways as well as with normal human faces: Ambrosian Bible, Laud Mahzor.

One can find an explanation for the first category quite easily. The painter or the patrons of the manuscripts wanted to avoid the visual representation of a human being. There are several written sources that support this theory. On the one hand, Talmud commentaries and compendia discuss the problem of the visual representation of human beings.[66] Some of them offer a solution to the problem which seems to be directly relationed to the illustrations in the manuscripts. For instance, in the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century, Rosh (Rabbi Asher ben Jehiel, around 1250-1327) and his son, Rabbi Jacob ben Asher (1269-1343), developed an opinion according to which it was prohibited to depict human beings only in their full form, but a head without a body or a body without a head was permitted.[67] On the other hand, some responsa also dealt with the depiction of human beings. Rabbi Ephraim ben Isaac of Regensburg (1110-1175) stated that it was only permitted to depict human beings without human faces.[68]

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[66] For detailed discussion of the problem see Turán, *Képfogyatkozás*.

[67] The Rosh's activity is connected closely to late thirteenth-century Germany. He spent his early years in France and Germany. One of his teachers was his father, a follower of Juda ben Samuel he-Hasid. He was also taught by R. Meir von Rothenburg, who wrote some responsa on the visual representation of human figures. After the death of R. Meir in 1293 he "became the acknowledged leader of Germany Jewry" ("Asher ben Jehiel," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*). Because of the violent events taking place at that time, the Rosh left Germany in 1303 and settled in Spain. On his notes about visual depictions see Turán, *Képfogyatkozás*, 121-122. His son, who also moved to Spain in 1303, followed his father's opinion in his main halakhic compendium, in the *Arbaah Turim*, saying that "the fact that it is prohibited to depict a man and a dragon is expressly when they are in full form with all their limbs, but a head or a body without a head entails no prohibition to enjoy it when found or even when made." (*Arbaah Turim*, Joreh Deah 141, 144. Translation from Narkiss, "Zoocephalic Phenomenon," 61.)

[68] This responsum is cited by the Maharam, *Responsa* (Prague, 1608) no. 610, in Narkiss, "Zoocephalic Phenomenon," 59 and Jaffé, 70. Rabbi Ephraim studied in France as a pupil

The second category, where both zoocephalic and human-headed figures can be found, has proved to be more difficult to assess. If the features of the human faces were parts of the original concept, the purpose of the animal heads could not have been merely to avoid depicting human faces. They could have served as a characteristic attribute of a special group contrasted to another group or groups defined by human heads.

The third category, animal-heads together with human-heads and faces deformed in other ways, is probably the most confusing. One should look for the principle according to which the different kinds of head were distributed between the figures. Further research will be indispensable.

In three cases the application of animal-headed figures in contrast to other methods of covering the face or to human faces seems to have followed a pattern. The *Leipzig Mahzor* presents the most consistent one. In this manuscript, each figure is portrayed with the same type of bird-like head. There are only two exceptions: Gemini and the Egyptian soldiers – their heads are covered by helmets. Armor is a characteristic element of both iconographical types.[69] The Egyptian army and the Gemini often appear in armor, not exclusively in the context of efforts to hide the human face. One could imagine that under the helmets these figures had the same birdlike heads. Furthermore, other non-Jews in the Mahzor are depicted with the same distorted heads as Jews. In this way, one can place the *Leipzig Mahzor* in the first category and interpret the meaning of the zoocephalic motif by means of texts mentioned above.

In the *Bird's Head Haggadah*, the Jews mostly have animal heads, while the others – either "evil" Egyptians or the "good" angels – have human faces. Thus, this manuscript belongs to the second category. The idea of Jews as animals was present in Christian imagination. Christian art sometimes used zoocephalic motifs, namely, dog-headed figures, to portray Jews.[70] In that case, these images certainly would have to be understood negatively. But in a Jewish context, animal-headed Jews definitely had a positive meaning. As far as I know, however, no plausible written evidence composed by Jews has yet been

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of Rabbenu Tam and then returned to Germany. He spent some time in Speyer, where he had a sharp dispute with the local rabbis. Thus, he left Speyer, moved to Worms, and finally to Regensburg (Abraham Meir Habermann, "Ephraim ben Isaac," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*). The responsum of him was published among the responsa of Rabbi Eliezer ben Joel ha-Levi and among those of Rabbi Meir von Rothenburg.

[69] This is also true for Christian art. For instance, Egyptian soldiers wear similar closed helmets in the Morgan Bible (New York, Pierpont Library ms. 638, fol.9r), and Gemini is depicted as two armored soldiers, for instance, in a thirteenth-century German Latin psalter (Munich, Bayerische Staatbibliothek, clm.16137).

[70] Sometimes other kinds of distorted faces or simply dogs mark the Jews. There are also written sources which support this Christian concept. For Jews as dogs in Christian interpretation see Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs*, 38, 66 n12. For Jews with dog-heads in Psalter illustrations, see also James Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: a Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative* (Kortrijk: Van Ghemmert, 1979).

found which would support this distinction between the visual representation of Jews and non-Jews.[71]

The last manuscript in which one discovers a pattern is the Tripartite Mahzor. The investigation of its images has led to the result that the painter attempted to distinguish gender by use of animal and human heads. He depicted almost all women with animal heads and almost all men with human faces. Moreover, when he had to depict larger groups of people, he divided them into two parts according to gender.[72] The pattern prevails only among the biblical narratives.

Among the non-biblical scenes, six images depart from the pattern: five in the zodiac cycle and an illustration of a piyyut for Sukkot (vol. 2, fol.85r). As for the zodiac illustrations, one cannot disregard the fact that in Ashkenazi mahzors the prayer for dew and (sometimes also the prayer for rain) was usually illustrated with the signs of the zodiac, often accompanied by the Labors of the Months.[73] These illustrations derived from Christian liturgical books.[74] The received model was changed in some respects with special Jewish types emerging.[75] The two obviously human figures among the signs are Gemini and Virgo. In Ashkenazi mahzors, they were illustrated either with human figures or with

[71] Meyer Schapiro identified the birds with eagles and stated that the eagles were, on the one hand, the symbols of the Jews, and, on the other hand, the sign of the Holy Roman Empire (idem, "Introduction," 18). A historical event supposed to connect the two meanings occurred in 1236, when Frederick II declared all Jews *servi camerae nostrae*. The bird heads would then have this double meaning in the Bird's Head Haggadah: the bird-headed figures are Jews who are under the protection of the Emperor. Schapiro referred to two biblical passages that present the eagle as the symbol of Israel (Ex. 19.4 and Deut. 32.11-12). However, this explanation does not sound convincing since the passages he mentions seem to present God as an eagle rather than Israel as an eagle.

[72] This arrangement is a peculiar feature of the Tripartite Mahzor. Other Jewish and Christian manuscripts usually depict only men in these scenes, or men and women together. For instance, there are only men on the illustrations in the Leipzig Mahzor ("Crossing the Reed Sea" vol.1, fol.73r [fig. 30]; "Moses giving the Law to the Israelites" vol.1, fol.130v [fig. 28]), in the Dresden Mahzor ("Moses giving the Law to the Israelites" fol. 202v), and in the Bird's Head Haggadah ("Moses cleaving the Reed Sea" fol. 21v).

[73] According to Iris Fishof, the depictions of the signs followed the tradition of the calendars in contemporary Latin manuscripts of Christian psalters and prayer books. See Iris Fishof, "The Many Faces of the Zodiac," in *Written in the Stars. Art and Symbolism of the Zodiac*, ed. Iris Fishof (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 2001), 53.

[74] Fishof, "The Many Faces of the Zodiac," 53. Shalev-Eyni, investigating the origin of the zodiac signs in the Tripartite Mahzor, named two sources: Christian book illumination and Muslim tradition (eadem, "Ha-mahzor ha-meshullash," 98-109). In the case of late antique Jewish zodiac depictions the decisive influence certainly came from Hellenistic art.

[75] For instance, in most cases Capricorn and Aquarius were unified in one image, and Sagittarius was portrayed not with an entire figure, but merely with a bow (sometimes held in a hand).

animal-headed figures. The Michael (Bodley) Mahzor (Germany, 1258)[76] provides an early example of the zodiac cycle. In this manuscript, just as in the Worms Mahzor, both signs are depicted with bird-headed figures (vol. 1, fol. 58r, 59r), while in the Dresden (Double) Mahzor both are humans (Germany, fol. 265v).[77] Illustrating Gemini with zoocephalic figures and Virgo with a human-headed girl, the Tripartite Mahzor seems to unify two traditions. Since the zodiac cycle was a widespread iconographic theme in Ashkenazi book illumination, there is a possibility that the painter of the Tripartite Mahzor could have had some manuscripts available and used them as models. The use of models could have caused the deviation from the pattern of gender distinction. Another possible explanation for this deviation is that the zodiac signs are understood principally as symbols of star constellations and not real living creatures. Therefore, the painter or the patron did not feel the necessity to hide their faces. The other exception, at the beginning of a piyyut for Sukkot, is not a narrative biblical scene but an illustration of the text. The reason for its deviation from the pattern is not clear. Apart from these exceptions, in the biblical scenes there was a clear tendency to distinguish females from males.

The role of the animal motif in the studied manuscripts can be considered as auxiliary. It was a means by which the head of the human body was covered; the genus of the head does not seem to have been important. The zoocephalic figures remained human figures, in most cases biblical characters acting in biblical stories. The aim of covering human faces, however, varied considerably from manuscript to manuscript. Sometimes, the painter used it to avoid the depiction of human beings generally; sometimes he applied it to separate different groups from each other. One can consider the images of the Tripartite Mahzor as a case where these two functions mingle. The animal heads hid the female faces from the reader and, at the same time, they were a way of distinguishing between men and women.

Illustrations: Figs. 1-2, 4, 8, 9-14: out of Melnikoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs;* figs. 3, 6 and 7: by courtesy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; fig. 5: out of Metzger, *Jüdisches Leben*, 165.

[76] Oxford, Bodley Library, Ms. Mich. 617 and 627. Narkiss gives two different dates of the manuscript: 1258 ("Zoocephalic phenomenon," 51), and first quarter of the fourteenth century ("Machsor Lipsiae," 104 – here he speaks only about the Ms. Mich. 617).

[77] Vol.1: Dresden, University Library, Ms. A46a; vol.2: Breslau, University Library, Or. I, 1. Narkiss gives two different dates of the manuscript: around 1290 ("Zoocephalic phenomenon," 51), and mid-fourteenth century ("Machsor Lipsiae," 105 – here he speaks only about the first volume of the mahzor). Human figures in this manuscript are often depicted from the rear or with a headgear covering their eyes. The faces of the couple symbolizing Gemini are not hidden, they have blank faces, or the features were erased.

Appendix:

Animal-headed human figures in illuminated Hebrew manuscripts[78]

1. Ambrosian Bible, 1236-1238, Ulm (Franconia).[79] Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Ms. 30-32; Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Ms. Parm. 3286-87.
2. Laud Mahzor, c.1260,[80] Southern Germany. Oxford, Bodley Library, Ms. Laud Or. 321.
3. Worms Mahzor, 1272, Franconia. Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library, Ms. Heb. 4°781/I.
4. Bird's Head Haggadah, c.1300, Franconia. Jerusalem, Israel Museum, Bezalel Art Section Ms. 180/57.
5. Leipzig Mahzor, c.1320, South-West Germany. Leipzig, University Library, Ms. V. 1102/I-II.
6. Tripartite Mahzor, c.1322, Southern Germany. Budapest, MTA Kaufmann Collection, Ms. A384; London, British Library Add. Ms. 22413; Oxford, Bodleian Library Ms. Michael 619.
7. Hammelburg Mahzor, 1348, Hammelburg (Franconia). Darmstadt, Hessische Lands- und Hochschulbibliothek, Cod. Or. 13.
8. Michael or Bodley Mahzor, 1258, Germany. Oxford, Bodley Library, Ms. Mich. 617 and 627.[81]
9. Tinted Mahzor, ca.1300, Franconia, London, British Library Add.26896.[82]
10. Alliance Israelite Mahzor, c. 1270-1300. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Alliance Israelite Universelle Ms. 24.[83]

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[78] This list differs from that of Narkiss since I omitted those items which do not depict animal-headed figures. In some cases, it could not be decided, whether a codex contained zoocephalic figures or not without seeing the entire manuscript. In these cases I decided on the basis of the images which were available for me. Narkiss includes the *Pentateuch of the Duke of Sussex* (southern Germany, ca.1300 or second quarter of the fourteenth century) into the list. However, in a later book, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*, he says that although the faces of the human figures are somewhat strange, they are not as distorted "as those drawn in the southern German school" (*Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*, 104). Since I did not see the manuscript, and none of the images presented in it in the secondary literature depicts animal-headed figures I have omitted it from my list.

[79] Narkiss in his article on the zoocephalic phenomenon assigns the Ambrosian Bible and the Breslau Bible to Regensburg (Narkiss, "Zoocephalic phenomenon," 50). In the introductory volume of *The Bird's Head Haggadah*, however, as well as in the *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*, he assigns the Ambrosian Bible to Ulm (*The Bird's Head Haggadah*, 95; *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*, 90).

[80] Narkiss gives two different dates for the manuscript: around 1260 ("Zoocephalic phenomenon," 52) and around 1290 (*Machsor Lipsiae*, 104; "Mahzor;" *HIM*, 94).

[81] Among the available images only one depicts animal-headed humans, the sign of Gemini (Fig. 14.). Narkiss gives two different dates for the manuscript: 1258 ("Zoocephalic phenomenon," 51) and first quarter of the fourteenth century (*Machsor Lipsiae*, 104 – here he speaks only about Ms. Mich. 617).

[82] The only image I saw depicts the zodiac sign of Gemini as a woman with a double bird head.

[83] There is only one bird-headed figure in the *Alliance Israelite Mahzor*, (fol. 74v); Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs*, 25).

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Preface

Over the last two decades, interests in animals and the relationship between humans and animals in the past have increased decisively. This is also true particularly for the research into the Middle Ages. A variety of perspectives and approaches can be traced concerning

- the questions asked;
- the used source evidence: zooarchaeological, textual, visual;
- the embedding of the analyses into the wider fields of the study of the history of nature, environment, economy, religion and theology, signs and symbols, social history, and so on;
- the degrees and levels of the application of interdisciplinary and comparative methods;
- the level of consciousness of the diversities of use and functions of animals in medieval society, on the one hand, and of the contextualized networks of their meanings, on the other hand.

Such a consciousness of animal diversities and, at the same time, of animal networks has been the basis for this volume of collected essays. They originate from a number of international research collaborations, communications, and presentations at international meetings, such as the annual Medieval Conferences at Kalamazoo and Leeds. All the contributors have aimed to show individual aspects of human-animal relations and have also been interested in the social contexts animals occur in. Therefore, the book is meant to represent *Animal Diversities* but certainly also, in particular, the indispensable *Animal Contexts* and *Contextuality*: from zooarchaeological evidence to zoocephalic females in visual representations of Ashkenazi Jews; from the economic function of animals in Cistercian houses to the role of their representations in Gothic misericords; from animals in chronicles or hagiographical texts to their images at different levels of late medieval visual public space.

Some recently initiated projects, two of them introduced in the volume, others referred to in the contributions, will hopefully also open up possibilities for new insights into the variety of roles and functions that were played by and constructed for all kinds of fauna in the Middle Ages.

"Zoology of the Middle Ages" may then perhaps be seen, in general, as one of the model fields for representing the importance of relations and connections between the sciences and humanities, economy and theology, daily life

and symbolic meaning, nature and culture, intention and response, as well as construction and perception, …

December 2005 Gerhard Jaritz

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