ZOOCEPHALIC FIGURES IN THE TRIPARTITE MAHZOR

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The so-called *Tripartite Mahzor* from fourteenth-century Ashkenazi southern Germany is one of the most mysterious illustrated Hebrew manuscripts. In it, well-known biblical stories are depicted in a strange way. The peculiarity of these illuminations is that they seem to represent a distinction between the genders. Most women have animal heads, while men have normal human faces, and in some cases males and females form different groups.

The *Tripartite Mahzor* is not the only Jewish manuscript that contains animal-headed human figures in its illumination. The zoocephalic motif is a characteristic feature of several other 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. This motif has already been dealt with in a number of studies but has not been solved yet. In this paper I focus on the *Tripartite Mahzor* and try to find an explanation for its gender distinction.

In its present form, the *Tripartite Mahzor* is divided into three volumes.[1] None of them has a colophon, thus neither its patron nor its painter is known. The only name given in the manuscript is that of the scribe, a certain Hayyim. The determination of its date of production has to be based on secondary evidence such as stylistic features, heraldic signs, and the mention of the already deceased Rabbi Meir von Rothenburg (d. 1293). According to these features the manuscript was produced around 1322 in the area of Lake Constance in southern Germany.[2]

Who ordered the prayer book and who was its painter? These questions cannot be answered on the grounds of the data that are available now. However,

[1] Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences MS A384; London, British Library Add. Ms. 22413; Oxford, Bodleian Library Ms. Michael 619.

[2] 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), 130.

some general conclusions may be drawn from the content and the layout of the codex. It contains piyyuts (liturgical verses connected to the festivals) which were read aloud by the *hazzan*.[3] The manuscript is quite large[4] 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 in 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, only citation is offered from 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."[5]

There are three kinds of illumination in the prayer book: miniatures at the beginning of the piyyuts, two zodiac cycles, one together with the Labors of the Months, and a few floral decorations in the margin. The miniatures at the beginning of the piyyuts are partially biblical scenes, partially illustrations connected more closely to the text of the verses. The gender distinction—zoocephalic women versus human-headed men—is present in the biblical scenes, but there are also apparent exceptions that pertain to the signs of the zodiac and the Labors of the Months. These exceptions will be discussed below.

Zoocephalic figures appear in four biblical scenes, one illustration connected to the piyyut, and two images of the zodiac cycles. All of them are found in the first and the second volume: Two initial words and one zodiac sign in the first volume, and three initial words and one zodiac sign in the second one. There are some human figures in other images; all are males with normal human faces. The third volume does not depict human figures at all.

In the biblical scenes all the women are depicted with animal heads and all the men with human heads. In the first volume, at the beginning of the Song of Songs (part of the Pesah liturgy), Solomon appears on his throne (*Fig. 1*). On

[3] The *hazzan* is the precentor who intones the liturgy and leads the prayers in the synagogue (Hyman Kublin and Akiva Zimmerman, "Hazzan," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CD-ROM Edition Version 1.0 ([Israel]: Judaica Multimedia, Keter Publishing House, 1997). (Hereafter: *EJ*).

[4] Volume 1: 310×215 mm; volume 2: 315×220 mm; volume 3: 340×245 mm. The size of the text areas is the same in all volumes: 200×155 mm. The main text was written in Ashkenazi square script, while the commentaries are in cursive on the outer margins.

[5] Marc Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (State College, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 7.

the left side of the image two other scenes are depicted. The upper one is probably "The Visit of the Queen of Sheba," while the lower one may portray the two mothers quarreling over a baby, who does not appear, however. Each woman is depicted with an animal head.

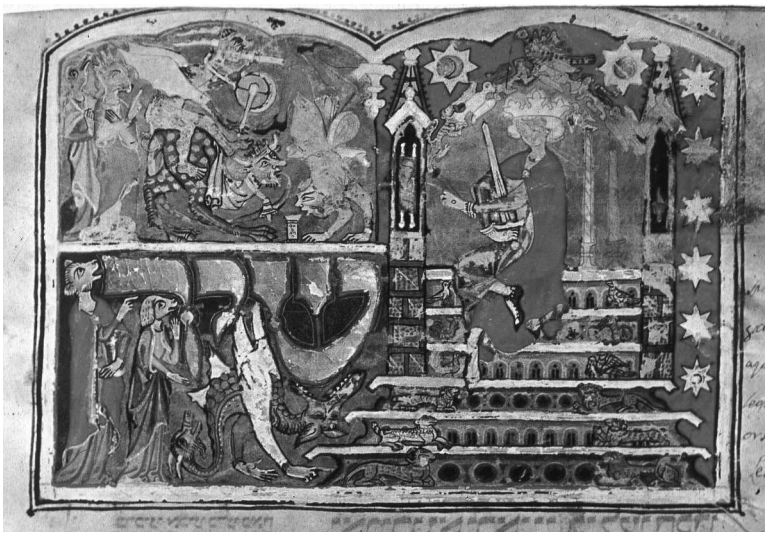

Fig. 1. The Throne of Solomon, Tripartite Mahzor*, vol. 1, fol. 183v.*

Still connected to the Pesah liturgy, one image decorates a piyyut about "Crossing the Reed Sea" (Hebrew for the Red Sea) (*Fig. 2*). The marching Israelites are divided into two groups: first the men led by Moses, all with normal human heads; behind them the animal-headed women are led by Miriam. They hold human-headed babies in their arms. Here, the gender distinction is strengthened by the arrangement of the figures.

The miniature adorning a piyyut for Shavuot depicts the Israelites receiving the Torah (*Fig. 3*). Here the arrangement is the same as in the "Crossing the Reed Sea:" Men and women create different groups. In this case the separation of men and women leans on a written source, namely an eight-century midrash, the *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*,[6] according to which "Rabbi Pinhas says, the eve of Shabbat Israel stood at Mount Sinai, the men arranged by themselves and the women by themselves."

[6] *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 40. Sarit Shalev-Eyni, "Ha-Mahzor ha-Meshullash," Ph.D. dissertation (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 2001), 8.

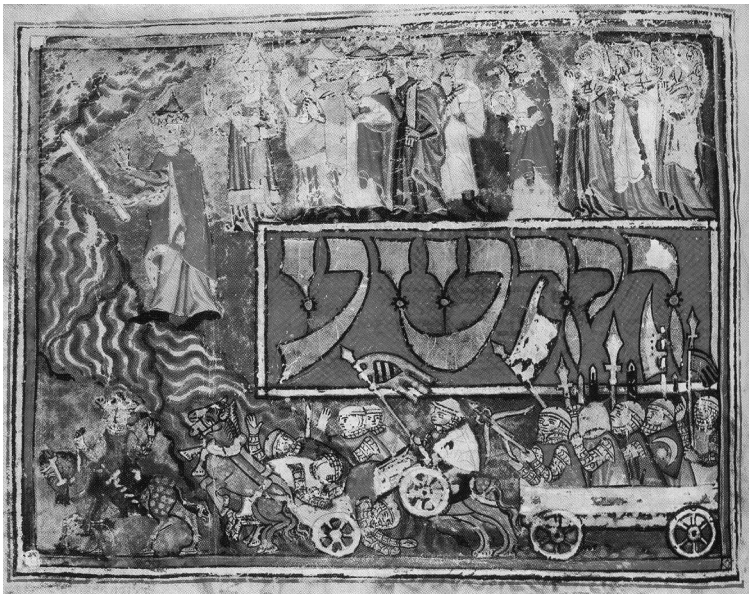

Fig. 2. Crossing the Reed Sea, Tripartite Mahzor volume 1, fol. 197r.

Fig. 3. Receiving the Torah, Tripartite Mahzor volume 2, fol.3r.

Shavuot has another miniature at the beginning of the Book of Ruth (*Fig. 4*). This miniature provides more individual characters than the other images. The identification of these figures, however, is not so unambiguous. The important point for the research here is that all the female figures have animal heads and all the males have human heads.

Fig. 4. The Book of Ruth, Tripartite Mahzor volume 2 fol. 71r.

As for the animal heads, in the Mahzor one can describe them sometimes as mammal heads and sometimes as bird heads, but their exact genera cannot be identified. Moreover, the same figure, Ruth, who can be identified with at least two figures in one image, is portrayed with different kinds of heads, once with a bird head, the second time with a mammal head. This suggests that the role of the animal heads in this manuscript was not to mirror the inner characteristics of the biblical figures, but primarily to cover human, more precisely, *female* faces. Which concepts may stand in the background of this distinction according to gender? Can one find similar ideas in contemporary written sources?

Written Sources

Sight in the commission of sin

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 idolatry, just as sight and adultery, are strongly connected ideas.[7] Both idolatry and

[7] 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), 20–31 (hereafter: Turán, *Képfogyatkozás*). In the first

adultery are unfaithfulness or breaking an alliance. In one case, the son of Israel, who turns away from God to worship a foreign god, that is, an idol, breaks the alliance made between God and the people of Israel. In the other case, a wife, who is unfaithful to her husband, breaks the alliance of their marriage. In both cases the sense of sight plays a central role.

One can find numerous examples of this connection in the Bible.[8] Among the commandments in the Book of Numbers is an important sentence which led to many interpretations in later Jewish literature:

> 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 your heart and your eyes, which you follow so faithlessly![9]

The *Talmud Bavli* interprets this verse as the following:

> 'After your own heart' – this is the *minut*, like 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).[10]

Thus, one's heart and eyes are the two main assistants of sin. On the one hand, the act of seeing is capable of generating dangerous desires, which can then lead to sin; on the other hand, the objects of sight may also be dangerous. The rabbinical literature warns of this danger many times. The *Talmud Yerushalmi* says in connection with Num.15:39: "Said R. Levi, 'The heart and the eyes are the two procurers of the sin ...' "[11] Similarly, Rashi (France, 1040–1105)[12] gives the following interpretation of Numbers 15:39: "…the heart and the eyes are

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subchapter he points out the close relationship of two of the Ten Commandments. These two are the prohibition of idolatry (Ex. 20.3) and the prohibition of adultery (Ex. 20.13–14).

[8] Turán, *Képfogyatkozás*, 26. E. g. the whole book of Hosea is built on the metaphor of the unfaithful wife, Israel, and her jealous husband, God.

[9] Num. 15:39. 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).

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

[11] *Talmud Yerushalmi*, Berachot, 1.4. (translation by the author)

[12] Rashi is the abbreviation of Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac. He is the leading Ashkenazi commentator on the Bible and the *Talmud Bavli*.

the spies of the body, they procure him the sins, the eye sees, the heart desires, and the body commits the sins."

Gazing at a woman

Certain seen objects increase the danger of committing a sin by being seductive. Women are such objects. The demand to limit communication with them is already present in the *Mishnah*: "Do not engage in too much conversation with women."[13] They are dangerous when they are gazing at someone as well as when they are seen. The gaze of a woman can bewitch a man, who then easily commits a sin; seeing a woman can generate sinful desire in the heart and leads to the same result.[14] Such a concept seems to shed light on the intention of the painter or patron of the Mahzor. Is it possible that the animal faces were supposed to prevent the reader of the prayer book from gazing at women, even illustrations of women? To judge the plausibility of this interpretation one has to try to find sources closer to the *Tripartite Mahzor* in both time and space.

The writings of the Hasidei Ashkenaz provide a good opportunity to form a closer image of the concepts that were present in thirteenth/fourteenth-century Germany. The Hasidei Ashkenaz was a pietistic movement flourishing in German lands in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[15] Texts related to the Hasidei Ashkenaz could have influenced the phenomenon of gender separation in the Mahzor.

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[13] *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.

[14] Turán, *Képfogyatkozás*, 81–84.

[15] These 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 provides a systematic survey of older literature about them (*Piety and Society. The 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. This family had 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 through most of Germany and into some parts of France (Joseph Dan, "Hasidei Ashkenaz," in *EJ*). 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).

The *Sefer Hasidim*, the main ethical work of the Hasidei Ashkenaz—the title covers different text collections, not a single book—refers to the negative aspects of seeing, especially gazing at women many times.[16]

> 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. [emphasis added][17]

This paragraph contains two important statements. First, that enjoying what one sees is a transgression; and second, that causing this joy, or even desire, in someone 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.

Warnings against gazing at women are also present in other statements of the *Sefer Hasidim*. Every woman, even a pious one, is able to lead a man to sin. In order to avoid sexual sins a man should get married because if he lives in a happy marriage he will not desire other women. This "fence" is certainly not enough, however. A man should not look at women lest sinful thoughts emerge in his heart. Both of these warnings also 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."[18] A man's attitude towards women can influence other people's judgment 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 a 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

[16] 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.

[17] *Sefer Hasidim, Bologna edition* §1136. The translation is from Moshe Idel, "Gazing at the Head in Ashkenazi Hasidism," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6 (1997): 281–282.

[18] *Sefer ha-Roqeah ha-Gadol*, Hilkhot Teshuvah no. 20.

> smooth tongue of a forbidden woman. Do not lust for her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyelids.'(Proverbs 6:24–25)[19] [emphasis added]

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

> [The pious man's] **intent is for heaven's sake and he does not look at the countenance of women**… 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,[20] 'Nothing interposes better before desire, than closing one's eyes.'[21] [emphasis added]

Visual representation of the human being

Besides the fear of women, one should not ignore a more general idea, the traditional Jewish aversion to depicting human creatures. Man is created in the image of God; therefore, his representation means the representation of God himself, against which there is a biblical prohibition. Making an image is also suspicious from another crucial point of view: it carries the danger of idolatry. One can form an image for worshiping it as a god. Moreover, this action imitates the action of God, which is considered not only sacrilege, but also as a dangerous act.[22]

The Jews' attitude towards the depiction of a human figure was never homogeneous; there were always different opinions. One can recognize a significant difference between the opinions of rabbis living in Muslim countries and in Christian territories. The strict prohibition of Islam of depicting human figures had a strong impact on the Jews of these regions. In Christian countries visual representation of humans was a widespread custom, so Jews could be more lenient, they did not have to fear that "the other" would consider them

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[19] *Sefer Hasidim, Bologna edition* §1000. The translation is from Avraham Yaakov Finkel, *Sefer Chasidim. The Book of the Pious by Rabbi Yehudah HeChasid* (Northvale: Iason Aronson, 1997), 217.

[20] *Talmud Yerushalmi*, Berachot 1:5.

[21] *Sefer Hasidim, Bologna edition* §9. The translation is from Judith 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.

[22] See for example the various legends of the *golem*.

worse in this respect. This contribution of views is only a general statement; on closer examination one could certainly find quite strict rabbis in the West and lenient rabbis in Muslim territories.

The main sources of rabbinical opinions are, on the one hand, Talmudic compendia and commentaries—these contain general statements and rules—and on the other hand, response literature, which deals with concrete cases based on various interpretations of Toraic laws or Talmudic passages.[23]

The criteria on which visual representation were judged were of three kinds: first, the spatial dimension of the object, second, its theme, and third its completeness (meaning that it is not damaged or distorted). In many cases these three approaches mingle. The spatial dimension was a significant factor, since from biblical times, statues, three-dimensional objects, were considered as idols par excellence. Reading texts that discuss the problem, an often-advised strategy for avoiding the depiction of human figures is the distortion or mutilation of the figures. The Tosafot, Talmudic exegetes in twelfth- and thirteenth-century France and Germany, commenting on the Avodah Zarah tractate of the *Talmud Bavli*, declared that only a whole human figure or human face is forbidden, but half a face can be depicted.[24] "Whole" and "half" refer to the three- or two-dimensional depiction, therefore, "whole" means here a round-shaped figure and "half" means a flat representation, embroidered or painted on textile.

The Talmud compendium of the Rosh (Rabbi Asher ben Jehiel, around 1250–1327) contains important notions on human figures. He, similarly to the Tosafot, differentiates between whole and not whole depictions; however, for him the two categories mean the completeness or incompleteness of a figure, and not the spatial extent of the object. If a depiction is not a whole human figure, that is, not a complete figure, there is no suspicion of it being an idol. His son, Rabbi Jacob ben Asher (1269–1343), who moved to Spain in 1303, follows his father's opinion in his main halakhic compendium, 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."[25]

A twelfth-century tosafist, Rabbi Ephraim ben Isaac of Regensburg (1110–1175), had a responsum which deals with the decoration of the Torah mantles

[23] A detailed discussion of the biblical and Talmudic sources can be found in Turán, *Képfogyatkozás*, 100–108. Concerning the medieval sources see ibidem, 108–127.
[24] Tosafot 43a, "*lo taasun*."
[25] *Arbaah Turim*, Joreh Deah 141, 144. The translation is in 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), 61 (hereafter: Narkiss, "Zoocephalic Phenomenon").

and circumcision jackets.[26] He decrees that one is allowed to pray in a synagogue where such objects are decorated with animal figures and plants, since these images are not considered as idols for the gentiles—the only exception is the dragon, which might be worshiped. He also allowed the depiction of human beings *only if they do not have human faces.*

In his Talmud commentary a Provençal scholar, Rabbi Menahem ben Solomon (1249–1306), known as ha-Meiri,[27] discusses in detail the issue of making and using decorated objects. In the case of objects made by non-Jews, one cannot know whether non-Jews consider them as idols or not. Therefore, owning an object made by a non-Jew which is decorated with a human face is permitted only if the face is deficient or distorted either by the maker or by a Jew. He also says that objects decorated with animal figures are permitted to be used, since animals cannot be regarded as idols.

R. Meir ben Baruch von Rothenburg, the Maharam (died 1293), was a major authority in late thirteenth-century Germany.[28] He has a responsum which deals with decorated prayer books:

> You asked concerning the forms of animals and birds that are in prayer books, and are surprised that I do not object to them, since it has been taught: "You shall not make yourself a sculptured image" (Ex. 20:4) even of animals and fowl, nor an engraving. One might say, you may make a two-dimensional representation…It seems to me they are not acting properly, since when they look at these forms, they do not concentrate during their prayers on their Father who is in heaven. However, there is no prohibition in this case because of the injunction "You shall not make an idol" (Ex. 20:4) and so forth…. There is no substance at all to pictures that are made merely from paints. We are suspicious of idolatry only with a projecting relief seal

[26] This responsum is cited by the Maharam, *Responsa* (Prague, 1608) no. 610; in Narkiss, "Zoocephalic Phenomenon," 59 and in 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), 70.

[27] Ha-Meiri, *Beit ha-Behirah,* al massekhet Avodah Zarah, in Turán, *Képfogyatkozás*, 117. His Provençal name was Don Vital Solomon. According to Turán this source may have some connection with the zoocephalic figures appearing in Hebrew manuscripts.

[28] As mentioned above, the name of Rabbi Meir appears in all three volumes of the *Tripartite Mahzor.*

> but not with an intaglio, and certainly not with an image that does not project and is not sunken, but is merely painted…[29]

The original question cannot be reconstructed precisely. According to the Tosafot, it referred to those who painted such books. However, there are other traditions according to which the question was why the Maharam did not prevent the making or (a third interpretation) the using of these books.[30] On the basis of the last two variations, one may suggest that the books had already been painted when the Maharam was asked. At this point one must take into consideration that—as was clear in the case of Eliakim bar Josef von Mainz—rabbis were often asked after the object had already been made or installed.[31] The permissibility of an object or ornament was brought into question by those members of the community, usually conservative ones, who had doubts concerning the appropriateness of that object. Therefore the influence of certain responsa on the decoration of manuscripts is not obvious. One can speak rather of a mutual relationship between the rabbis' decrees and book illumination. A decorated book could have brought about the objection or the approval of a rabbinical authority and then this opinion might have had an influence on the decoration of other books.

Apart from the rabbinical authorities, another tendency concerning images appeared in thirteenth-century Germany with the activity of the Hasidei Ashkenaz. The attitude towards any kind of visual representation which is outlined in literary works connected to this "group," is apparently negative. They did not make a distinction between the visual representation of a human figure and non-human creatures or things. They interpreted the Second Commandment strictly, and therefore "forbade any adornment even in the home or on clothing."[32]

These written sources may provide answers to some relevant questions. Why was it necessary to hinder the reader from seeing human beings? Because sight is a dangerous act.—What can the reason be for hindering someone from seeing women? Since gazing at women carries increased danger and can easily

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[29] His answer is incorporated into the text of the Tosafot at the margins of the *Talmud Bavli.* (Tosafot to Yoma 54a and b). The English translation is from Vivian B. Mann, ed., *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 110–111(hereafter: *Jewish Texts*).

[30] Turán, *Képfogyatkozás*, 127, n327.

[31] Mann, *Jewish Texts,* 16. She presents two exceptions when rabbis were consulted before the creation of the objects.

[32] Narkiss, "Zoocephalic phenomenon," 57.

lead to committing a sin.—How can someone avoid depicting and depict a figure at the same time?—By distorting that figure or mutilating its body.

Revealing Possibilities

Such ideas concerning women and the dangers caused by them seem to be similar to the handling of female figures in the *Tripartite Mahzor*. Female faces are to be hidden from the eyes of the male reader. In addition, if a crowd was depicted, as in the "Crossing the Reed Sea" or in the "Receiving the Torah," the groups of men and women were separate from each other.

There are five exceptions in the manuscript that deviate from the "animal-headed-females—human-headed males" pattern. In both zodiac cycles the sign of Gemini is depicted as zoocephalic males, while the sign of Virgo is represented as a human-headed young woman. The fifth deviation is a bird-headed man at the beginning of a piyyut for Sukkot. This image is not a narrative biblical scene, but an illustration of the text. The reason for its deviation from the pattern is not clear.

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. These illustrations were derived from Christian liturgical books. The received model was changed in some respects and special Jewish types emerged. Since the zodiac cycle was already a widespread iconographic theme in Ashkenazi book illumination in the fourteenth century, there is a possibility that the painter of the *Tripartite Mahzor* could have seen some manuscripts and used them as models. The usage of models could have influenced the deviation from the pattern of gender distinction. In addition, zodiac signs were understood principally as symbols of star constellations and not as depictions of living creatures. In this way, even Gemini and Virgo might not have been regarded as representations of human figures. The painter or the patron may not have felt the necessity to hide their faces.

The pietistic texts on "dangerous" women quoted above may offer an explanation for the gender zoology of the *Tripartite Mahzor*. This manuscript is not the only example of the zoocephalic phenomenon, however. There are at least nine other manuscripts that contain animal-headed figures.[33] In all of them, these zoocephalic figures remain human, usually biblical characters, acting in

[33] For a list of these manuscripts see Bezalel Narkiss, "Introduction to the Mahzor Lipsiae," in *Machsor Lispiae*, ed. Elias Katz (Hanau/Main: Dausien Verlag, 1964), 104–105.

biblical stories. Animal heads are used as veils to cover the figures' real faces, but the patterns in which they are applied vary considerably from manuscript to manuscript. Some of them use the motif together with other methods of covering the human head. In the *Leipzig Mahzor*[34] the Egyptian soldiers wear helmets and all the others have bird-like faces (*Fig. 5*). In some codices both animal and human heads appear, and among them some, just like the *Tripartite Mahzor*, apply the zoocephalic motif apparently to separate different groups from each other. In the *Bird's Head Haggadah*,[35] for example, Jews are depicted with bird heads, while non-Jews have human heads (*Fig. 6*). While in the case of some manuscripts one cannot discover any pattern. Thus, the zoocephalic motif seems to have been a flexible matter that did not have any decided way of handling but offered a good method of hiding and of differentiating.

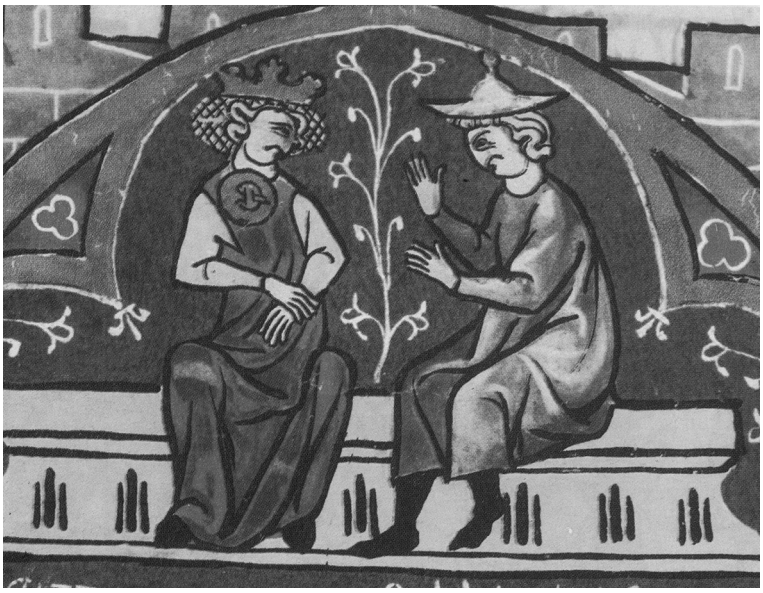

Fig. 5. Illustration of the piyyut for Shabbat ha-Gadol, Leipzig Mahzor volume 1, fol. 64v (detail).

[34] *Leipzig Mahzor*, ca.1320, southwest Germany, Leipzig, University Library, Ms. V. 1102/I–II.

[35] *Worms Mahzor*, 1272, Franconia, Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library, Ms Heb. 4°781/I.

The *Tripartite Mahzor* is unique concerning the application of animal heads to differentiate females from males. At the same time, however, it fits the context of the other zoocephalic manuscripts: it uses the motif to hide and differentiate. The animal heads hide the female faces from the reader and create a distinction between men and women.

Textual sources shed light on the possible theological or spiritual context in which the *Tripartite Mahzor* was produced and offer a plausible explanation for its gender zoology. However, it is necessary to emphasize that no direct relationship between the images and these texts can be proved. As for the biblical and the rabbinical sources—being basic texts of the Jewish culture—they are too general to explain a local phenomenon and they are also far from the Mahzor both in time and space. Even in the case of the writings of the Hasidei Ashkenaz one has to be cautious, as one cannot demonstrate a direct relationship between them and the Mahzor, although they are much closer to it geographically and chronologically, first, because the circumstances of the production of the Mahzor are not known; second, because the Hasidei Ashkenaz and its literary activity is not an unequivocal phenomenon. There is no scholarly consensus concerning the nature of this movement and its influence on the wider Jewish society. Moreover, the *Sefer Hasidim* has several different versions. It is impossible to determine which version was spread in which region. A thirds reason might be that there are several passages in the *Sefer Hasidim* which generally disapprove of the decoration of books or garments.

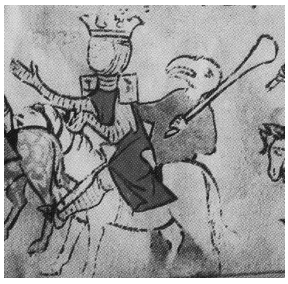

Fig. 6. Pharaoh and a Jew, Bird's Head Haggadah, *fol. 24r (detail).*

Still, these texts represent a spiritual context in which the intention to avoid gazing at dangerous women might have spread even to the area of book illumination and might have caused or, at least, influenced such a "zoology of gender."