

## **Archetype and Adaptation: Passover *Haggadot* from the Stephen P. Durchslag Collection**

The week-long, springtime Jewish holiday of *Pesach*, or Passover, is beloved for its symbolic meaning and joyous customs. Passover marks the freeing of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, a narrative with universal appeal as a paradigm for collective and, according to some traditions, personal liberation. The *Haggadah* (plural: *Haggadot*), or “telling,” is the collection of prayers, legends, and stories recited on the eve of Passover. The basic text derives from the biblical instruction to retell the story of the Exodus each year during Passover in conjunction with a ritual meal called the Seder, or “order” (Exodus 13:8). Over the centuries songs and illustrations have been added to engage children, to whom the story was to be told, and some passages are given added prominence when they resonate with contemporary concerns. Illustrations in medieval manuscripts depict scenes from Exodus, the life of Moses, and Jewish Patriarchs. Many of these scenes continue to appear in early printed *Haggadot*, but the emphasis shifts to passages drawn directly from the text. The *Haggadah* has shown remarkable stability and flexibility: thousands of editions in all languages testify to its central role in Jewish life and its ability to incorporate new themes and respond to changing conditions.

This exhibition is drawn entirely from the private collection of Stephen P. Durchslag, the largest known collection of *Haggadot* in private hands. “Archetype and Adaptation” explores the enduring influence of early printed *Haggadot* as well as the ability of modern versions to reflect political and social developments such as the Holocaust, Zionism, gay rights, and feminism. The *Haggadah* embodies the adaptive genius of Jewish practice and the consequent vitality of Jewish life. Items selected for the exhibition exemplify early *Haggadah* archetypes and later adaptations, framed by facsimiles of medieval manuscripts and modern *Haggadot* illustrated by noted artists.

Illustrations were often copied and pirated in early printed books. Images were expensive to produce, so woodcuts were reused until they wore out and copper plates made long journeys from one city to another. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, several *Haggadot* became models for countless later editions. Yosef Yerushalmi has identified four early printed editions that served as “archetypes”: Prague (1526), Mantua (1560), Venice (1609), and Amsterdam (1695). Each of these was shaped by the artistic culture and printing trades of the city in which it was produced – for example, Renaissance Italian borders and architectural frames appear in Venice, copperplate engraving is used instead of woodcut in Amsterdam -- and introduced iconography that can be seen in *Haggadot* produced hundreds of years later. The exhibition traces the movement of these models across continents and time, demonstrating the enduring appeal of the *Haggadah* story and the infinite variety of interpretation and adaptation it inspires.

I would like to express my gratitude to Stephen P. Durchslag for sharing his magnificent collection with the University of Chicago community.

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*Note:* All biblical quotations are from *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler; Michael Fishbane, Consulting Editor. Jewish Publication Society, *Tanakh* Translation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

### Group : The Messiah and Elijah

During the Seder, while the verse “Pour out Your Fury on the nations that do not know you” (Psalms 79:6) is recited aloud from the *Haggadah*, the door of the house is opened to welcome the herald of the Messiah, the prophet Elijah.

The custom of reciting this verse before the final section of the *Haggadah* derives from the Middle Ages and likely represents a reaction to the massacres of European Jewry during the First crusades of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The first pictorial representation of the Messiah in this context appeared in the Prague edition of 1526, where a small woodcut illustrates the biblical verse. The Mantua edition of 1568 adds the prophet Elijah and also a soldier representing the persecutors of Israel to the illustration, which appears on the bottom center of the left page.

In the Venice edition of 1599 the soldier, who had appeared above the Messiah, has been placed to his left. A new caption has been added, which reads, “On a donkey foaled by a she-ass” (Zechariah 9:9).

David Moss (b.1946), an artist and illuminator based in Jerusalem, was commissioned in 1983 to create a *Haggadah* in the tradition of medieval manuscripts. The facsimile of his unique work, published in 1987, includes his contemporary adaptation of the Mantua illustration of Elijah and the Messiah, who are the figures on the right in the Moss illustration. Moss associates the Messiah with a mystical interpretation attributed to the Kabbalist Isaac Luria (1534-1572): The artist links Elijah, who is shown blowing a *shofar*, or ram’s horn, to a verse from the Jewish liturgy calling for the blowing of the *shofar* to herald the messianic redemption.

### Group : The Four Sons

The number four occurs in several contexts in the *Haggadah* and has been interpreted as possibly referring to the four seasons. The Four Questions, usually posed by the youngest Seder participant during the telling of the Exodus story, explore the distinguishing features of the holiday by asking how this night is different from others. The answers highlight symbolic activities in which Jews engage on Passover such as eating *matzah* and bitter herbs, dipping vegetables in salt water, and reclining at meals.

The Four Sons described in the text of the *Haggadah* are the Wise Son, the Wicked Son, the Simple Son, and the son “who knows not how to ask.” The Wicked Son is traditionally rendered as a soldier. The warlike envisioning of the Wicked Son draws upon an iconographic tradition in German *Haggadah* manuscripts which mirrored a medieval German Jewish tendency to equate war with evil.

The first pictorial representation of the Wicked Son as a soldier in a printed *Haggadah* appears in the Prague edition of 1526. In his illustrations for the Amsterdam edition of 1695, Abraham ben Jacob, the first *Haggadah* illustrator whose name is known, assembled the Four Sons into one

image. His illustration of the Four Sons became the standard and was widely disseminated in many later *Haggadot*. The Wicked Son of the Amsterdam edition, second from the right in the illustration, is portrayed as a soldier, as was his counterpart in the Prague edition.

The 1695 Amsterdam edition is also the first to use copperplate engravings, rather than woodcuts, to illustrate the text. The illustrations were derived from biblical and other engravings by the Swiss artist Matthaeus Merian (1593-1650). Engravings are capable of much finer detail, and this edition is also notable for being the first Hebrew book to include a map of the Holy Land.

The Four Sons woodcut that appears on the right-hand page of the 1722 Offenbach edition is modeled upon the Amsterdam illustration. The Offenbach artist has added clouds and grass, filling in the picture.

The minimalist line drawings by Otto Geismar (1873-1957) in the 1927 edition published in Berlin are wholly original. The Wicked Son, in the upper left-hand corner of the right page, is not warlike, but rather thumbs his nose in a gesture of mockery.

### Group : Representing the Seder Scene

Passover is celebrated in the home, and scenes of the family seated around the Passover Seder table are one of the pillars of *Haggadah* illustration. Parallels between the Seder and the Last Supper have been noted in discussions of whether the Last Supper was a Seder. A very early illustrated *Haggadah* (Iberia or the Ottoman Empire, ca1500), contains a Seder scene, as does the Latin translation (Frankfurt am Main, 1512) by the Franciscan friar Thomas Murner (1475-ca.1537).

When illustrations are copied from earlier sources, accurate rendering of contemporary dress and other details of the original time and place become anachronistic. Thus, when the 1609 and 1629 Venetian editions became the model, the illustrations continued to show seventeenth-century Venetian attire. There are, however, notable exceptions: The Seder scene of the Offenbach edition of 1795 has a contemporary flavor, portraying a middle-class German Jewish family of the late eighteenth century, and the Seder scene of the Trieste edition of 1864 shows a contemporary middle-class Italian Jewish family rather than a seventeenth-century Venetian household.

The Seder scene of the Leghorn edition of 1867, a fine example of the persistence of the Venetian archetype in the nineteenth century, is a near-facsimile of the Venice edition of 1629.

### Group : The Order of the Seder

The order of the Seder refers to the sequence of fifteen ritual tasks that constitute the evening ceremony in the home: The fifteen tasks are (1) reciting the blessing for wine; (2) washing hands; (3) dipping vegetables; (4) breaking *matzah* (unleavened bread) and hiding a piece for dessert (*afikoman*); (5) telling the Exodus story; (6) washing hands again; (7) reciting the blessing for bread; (8) reciting the blessing for *matzah*; (9) reciting the blessing for bitter herbs; (10) eating the sandwich of *matzah* and bitter herbs; (11) eating the Passover meal; (12) eating the dessert *matzah* (*afikoman*), which had been hidden for the children to discover; (13) reciting grace; (14) reciting hymns of praise; and (15) singing the final songs of the Seder..

Fulfilling the order of the Seder involves a number of symbolic foods which are placed on a special Seder plate. Cracker-like *matzah*, which is free of all leavening, is called the “bread of distress” (Deuteronomy 16:3) and serves as a reminder that when the Jews were fleeing Egypt, they did not have time to allow the bread dough to rise. Before Passover begins all *chametz*, or leavened foods, must be removed from the home. On the night before the Seder, a thorough search for any leavened foods is carried out and any remaining *chametz* is either destroyed or sold.

In addition to *matzah* the Seder plate includes bitter herbs to evoke the suffering endured in slavery; a vegetable (dipped into salt water that represents the tears of the Israelites); *haroset*, a mixture that symbolizes the mortar used by the Jews for building in Egypt, typically made of chopped nuts, apples, spices, and red wine; and an egg for mourning (or fertility). The plate also contains a shank bone that stands for the sacrifice offered at Passover in ancient times.

Pictorial representation of the tasks appear first in the 1609 Venetian edition, and the Venetian woodcut, which proceeds from top to bottom, became a standard feature of many later editions. Its influence can be traced in the engraving for the 1712 Amsterdam edition, which depicts the singing of hymns at the end of the Seder, absent from the Judeo-Italian Venetian edition.

The order of the Seder illustration in the 1819 Ostroh edition, the first illustrated *Haggadah* to appear in Eastern Europe, is a woodcut with Yiddish translations in the margins.

The Bombay edition of 1846 was produced for the indigenous Jews of India, known as the Bene Israel (“Children of Israel”). The order of the Seder illustration is spread over three pages and proceeds from right to left in the manner of Hebrew, rather than from top to bottom. The Hebrew text is accompanied by a full translation in Marathi and many transliterated phrases printed in the Devanagari script.

#### Group : The Persistence of Persecution

A passage in the *Haggadah* reads: “And it is this [God’s promise to Abraham] which has stood beside our fathers and us. For not one alone has stood against us to destroy us, but in every generation they stand up to destroy us, and the Holy One Blessed is He delivers us from their hand.” This powerful text was not the subject of *Haggadah* illustration until 1921, when an engraving by Joseph Budko (1888-1940) showed a lone Jew, perhaps the sole survivor of a pogrom, who trudges through a desolate winter landscape. Budko, like Jacob Steinhardt (1887-1968), was born in Poland, and the persecution of Polish Jews should be kept in mind when viewing the work of these artists. Budko and Steinhardt became affiliated with the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem, an art school founded in 1906 for the purpose of creating a Jewish national artistic style.

Steinhardt illustrated the *Haggadah* passage that dwells upon the perennial persecution of the Jewish people for a 1923 edition published in Berlin. Like Budko, Steinhardt depicts Jewish wandering. Steinhardt’s illustration, on the left page, however, portrays a group rather than a single individual, emphasizing facial expression and bodily gesture where Budko favors landscape and anonymity. In Steinhardt we see Jewish energy and agitation; Budko’s wanderer is the epitome of quiet resignation.

Carrying the tradition of visual depiction of this theme to a harrowing climax is the illustration from the Munich edition of 1946, which was published in Germany for use by Holocaust survivors at the Seders of April 15 and 16, 1946. A description of these Seders by a participant, Solly Ganor, a survivor of the Dachau concentration camp near Munich, is available online. Ganor relates that the Seders were held at the Deutsches Theatre restaurant on Schwanthaler Strasse in the center of Munich. Ganor experienced outrage when the perennial persecution text was recited at the Seder: "When I looked at the remnants of survivors around me, these words seemed not only meaningless, but even mocking." The illustration of the perennial persecution text in the 1946 Munich edition portrays the execution of a group of Jews by a German soldier, a paradigm shift in the iconography of *Haggadah* illustration. The figure of the soldier, so long associated with the Wicked Son, is recast as a Nazi executioner. The caption reads, "for not one alone has stood against us to destroy us." The complete passage appears on a separate page of the edition.

The tradition of visual depiction of the perennial persecution text comes to an end after the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, when *Haggadot* begin to reflect hope for the Jewish future.

#### Group : The Song of Songs

The Song of Songs, a collection of poems about love from the Hebrew Bible, is the subject of ongoing commentary and interpretation. Also known as the Song of Solomon and the Canticle of Canticles, it was considered by early rabbis to be an allegory of God's love for the children of Israel. Early Christian theologians saw it as describing the relationship of Christ and the Church or of the soul to Christ and God. Its mystery and poetry have inspired many artists in all genres. The Song of Songs is often printed after the traditional *Haggadah* text, and it is customarily recited after the completion of the Seder.

The Song of Songs took on particular significance in the twentieth century for its expression of love for the land, which resonated with hopes for return of the Jewish people to Palestine:

For now the winter is past,  
The rains are over and gone.  
The blossoms have appeared in the land,  
The time of pruning has come;  
The song of the turtledove  
Is heard in our land.  
The green figs form on the fig tree,  
The vines in blossom give off fragrance.  
Arise, my darling;  
My fair one, come away!

(The Song of Songs 2:11-13)

The *Haggadot* shown here illustrate the increased prominence of this passage. In the 1922 Vilna edition, the Song of Songs is in its traditional location following the *Haggadah* text. In the 1942 edition published by Kibbutz Naan, located near Tel Aviv, the Jewish homeland passage appears in the preliminary pages along with other poetic compositions that treat the subject of spring.

In two 1947 editions, one published by Kibbutz Bet Ha-Shitah, located south of the Lower Galilee in Israel, and the other produced for refugees in Landsberg, Germany, the text moves to the frontispiece and becomes the subject of illustrations depicting the natural beauty and splendor of the Land of Israel.

#### Group : Transformations of the Ten Plagues

The Bible (Exodus 7:14-12:36) recounts ten plagues inflicted by God upon Egypt and the Egyptians to convince the Pharaoh to free the Israelites: blood, frogs, lice, wild beasts, cattle disease, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and the slaying of the first-born sons. The first few affected all of Egypt, but later plagues afflict only the Egyptians. The name of the holiday, Passover, signifies that the final plague “passed over” the houses of Israelites, which were identified by the sign of a sacrificial lamb’s blood on their doorposts. The Israelites were allowed to leave after this demonstration of God’s power to the world.

Reciting the ten plagues is a powerful, evocative component of the Seder service, and their dramatic nature is captured in many illustrations. The first pictorial representation of the ten plagues as a single illustration in a printed *Haggadah* appeared in the Venice edition of 1609. The Amsterdam *Haggadah* of 1781 includes an engraved version of the illustration from the Venice edition.

More than any other part of the *Haggadah*, the ten plagues provide a focal point for invoking the injustices that have been visited on particular social and political groups. *The Freedom Seder: A New Haggadah for Passover* (1969) protests racial discrimination and is suffused with the spirit of the civil rights movement, while *Seder to Celebrate Life, Peace, and Freedom* (1984) condemns weapons of mass destruction and advocates nuclear disarmament.

Feminist *Haggadot*, for example the *San Diego Women’s Haggadah*, first published in 1980, relate the ten plagues to the injustices against Jewish women, including the male representation of the divine and the sexist language that characterizes the traditional Jewish liturgy. The *Women’s Haggadah*, published in 1994, includes a separate list of ten plagues that afflict women. The tenth plague is the “Slaying of the Spirit,” lamenting the “captive spirits” of women. *Like an Orange on a Seder Plate: Our Lesbian Haggadah* (1999) laments racism, sexism, and classism.

#### Group : The Binding of Isaac

The biblical narrative of the binding of Isaac is recounted in Genesis 22. It is the story of God’s command to Abraham to slaughter his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, a command which ultimately proves to be a test of Abraham’s faith in God. At the conclusion of the narrative a ram is substituted for Isaac.

The Birds' Head *Haggadah* (South Germany, ca.1300), so called because the figures in its illustrations have the heads of birds and the bodies of human beings, includes illustrations of the Passover sacrifice in which the sacrificial animal is a ram. These illustrations forge a connection between the ram in the binding of Isaac and the lamb of the Passover sacrifice. Marc Michael Epstein, in *The Medieval Haggadah: Art, Narrative, and Religious Imagination* (Yale, 2011), argues that the linkage of the Passover sacrifice to the binding of Isaac invents a tradition that the binding of Isaac is “the true typological antecedent of the Passover sacrifice” (p.107).

The Golden *Haggadah*, named for the gold-tooled backgrounds of the illuminations, was produced in Catalonia in the first half of the fourteenth century. In *Illuminated Haggadot from Medieval Spain: Biblical Imagery and the Passover Holiday* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), Katrin Kogman-Appel discusses the relationship of the binding of Isaac illustration in the Golden *Haggadah* to contemporary Christian depictions. Kogman-Appel points out that the composition lacks an altar and wood in the shape of a cross, elements that are associated with Christian renderings of the binding of Isaac (p.174).

The Washington *Haggadah*, produced in 1478 in Germany, was the work of the scribe and illustrator Joel ben Simeon (ca.1420-1495). David Stern, in his essay “The Washington Haggadah: The Life of a Book” in *The Washington Haggadah* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), explains that ben Simeon “worked precisely at the moment of the critical juncture between the age of manuscripts and the new age of printing” (p.27). The illustrator was forced to compete with printers of early Hebrew books and left many margins blank to accommodate a potential buyer’s specific requests for decoration. This is evident in the “hallelujah” panel, which features, in the words of David Stern, “alternating red and blue letters against a background of intertwined leaves, a small gem that literally turns words into ornament” (p.28).

#### Group: Had Gadya

The song *Had Gadya* (Aramaic, “One Kid”), with which the Seder concludes, first appeared in manuscript *Haggadot* in the fifteenth century. Each of the ten stanzas adds a new twist, and the Seder ceremony comes to an end with the conclusion of the song. *Had Gadya* is popular with children because its lyrics are easy to remember and because of the many animals it describes, including a kid (baby goat), a cat, a dog, and an ox. Every stanza introduces a character or object that vanquishes the hero of the previous stanza. The song concludes with God’s triumph over the Angel of Death, thus ending the Seder on the hopeful note that faith in God can overcome all obstacles.

Arthur Szyk (1894-1951) was both a political artist and a brilliant illuminator. Born in Poland, Szyk spent time in Paris and moved to London where he was able to find a publisher for his *Haggadah*, published in 1939. Szyk used the Passover story to comment on current events in Poland during the 1930s, depicting the Israelites as Eastern European Jews and the Egyptians as Nazis. The illustration of *Had Gadya* shows a skeletal Angel of Death in the lower left-hand corner, scythe in hand, succumbing to bolts of lightning from heaven. After emigrating to the United States in 1940, Szyk produced anti-Nazi cartoons and illustrations.

The American artist Ben Shahn (1898-1969) was born in Lithuania and emigrated to the United States in 1906. For much of his career he produced works of social realism, including series of

paintings on the Dreyfus case and the Sacco and Vanzetti trials, In his later years he turned more to Jewish subjects, and in his *Haggadah*, published in Paris in 1966, the Angel of Death, winged with a stony expression, looks down upon his victims without mercy.

The French painter Raymond Moretti (1931-2005) was influenced by his love of jazz and illustrated a series of covers for recordings by jazz artists. He used a similar abstract approach to his art for a *Haggadah* published in Paris in 1980.

Maty Grünberg (b.1943) was born in Yugoslavia and studied at the Bezalel Academy in Jerusalem. His illustrations for the *Bezalel Haggadah*, published in 1984 in London, are woodcuts engraved on cherry-wood.

The *Pesach Haggadah in Memory of the Holocaust*, published in Haifa, Israel in 1985, was illustrated by David Wander (b.1954), an American artist who uses color and tone to enhance the viewer's experience. As in the Szyk illustration of *Had Gadya*, Wander includes all ten characters and objects in a single image, and employs lightning bolts to suggest God's power.