



Isaac's Sacrifice

Operation of Word and Image in Ashkenazi Religious Ceremonies

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ABSTRACT In the Ashkenazi public prayer domain, narratives and figures were limited to the illumination of large prayer books used by the cantor and smaller copies for private use, ordered by those members of the community who could afford them. The operation of word and image in this context enabled worshipers to interact with the human ancestors of the Jewish people and related fundamental biblical events perceived in the liturgy as ancestral merits. However, while the basic texts used in such collaborations were recited or sung by the cantor or believers and formed a consistent obligatory part of the liturgy, the images were always a flexible nonobligatory addition, open to variation. Often, there would be a clear gap between the two in regard to contents, a result of the way the Jewish visual language crystallized in Christian Europe. This article exemplifies the complexities involved in the process of such an operation as expressed in two Ashkenazi liturgical manuscripts of around 1300.

KEYWORDS word-image, Isaac's sacrifice, biblical ancestors, liturgical manuscripts, liturgy

Introduction

In the European urban centers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, visual media played a central role in designing and intensifying the religious experience of the believer in the public liturgical domain. Cathedrals and churches adorned with sculptured façades, stained glass windows, statues, and reliquaries surrounded the worshipper with images that reinforced the connection between each member of the community and the public ceremony in tangible ways. The urban landscape of many Christian cities in the Holy Roman Empire included not only cathedrals and churches but also a synagogue, used by the small local Jewish community.¹ Medieval synagogues were always modest in size and appearance. A limited repertoire

1 For the medieval synagogue, see e.g. Krautheimer (1927); Böcher (1960); Wischnitzer (1964); Shalev-Eyni (2015).

of carved vegetal or zoomorphic motifs does appear in some Jewish prayer halls, but the figural decoration typical of Christian places of worship was usually absent. Narratives and figures were limited to the illumination of large prayer books used by the cantor and smaller copies for private use in communal ceremonies, ordered by those members of the community who could afford them.² These images were usually located in or next to initial word panels, or within the text column. Other images were dispersed along the margins and often referred to the main text.³ This intimate and tangible relationship between word and image on the page, and the restriction of narrative representations to illuminated manuscripts which were part of the ceremonies, form a special case of integration between the visual and the textual. Moreover, since the letters of initial words were written in bold letters, often colored using ink and paint, the whole page might well have been regarded as an integrative visual entity operating not only together with the words written on the page and recited in the ceremonies, but also with additional related components which were not necessarily a direct part of the liturgy.

The operation of word and image, says Morgan, facilitates the practice of belief, stabilizes [2] elusive notions, and gives clear expression to hinted implications (Morgan 2020). In the Ashkenazi case, this cooperation enabled worshipers to interact, but not with saints; rather with the human ancestors of the Jewish people and related fundamental biblical events perceived in the liturgy as ancestral merits. Word and image are not reflections of one another (Morgan 2020), and in our context they do not share the same status. While the basic texts used in such collaborations were recited or sung by the cantor or believers and formed a consistent obligatory part of the liturgy, the images were always a flexible nonobligatory addition, open to variation. Often, there would be a clear gap between the two with regard to contents, a result of the way the Jewish visual language in Christian Europe crystallized. The Christians shared the Jewish belief in the Bible, though for the former it was the Old Testament. It was therefore natural for the Jews to adopt the visual narrative language of their surroundings, which was then already highly developed, and to use some of its accepted formulas (Kogman-Appel 2000; Shalev-Eyni 2016). However, since the differing Jewish and Christian interpretations of biblical events embodied the essence of the disagreement between the two religions, the images could, in certain cases, have become a place where the religious frames of the Jewish group and those of the surrounding Christian culture could have met (Shalev-Eyni 2016). Whereas the combination of word and image in Hebrew manuscripts produced in Christian Europe has been addressed in the literature, its place and effect in the liturgical domain has yet to be studied. Below, I will exemplify the phenomenon through the lens of the biblical narrative of Isaac's sacrifice in two Ashkenazi liturgical manuscripts of around 1300 from two different locations in the Holy Roman Empire: Brussels and Esslingen. Each case represents a different result, as well as a different way of interaction with Christian urban society.

Brussels: A Ritual Translation of a Biblical Scene

Jews settled in Brussels in the duchy of Brabant not later than 1260 (Avneri 1968, II:140– [3] 41), though a document from 1267 alludes that at that time their status may not yet have

2 For different aspects of the public Ashkenazi prayer book, see Beit-Arié (1985), with contributions by Malachi Beit-Arie, Ezra Fleischer, Bezalel Narkiss, Aliza Cohen-Mushlin, Ilan Eldar et alia; Sed-Rajna (1983); Kogman-Appel (2012).

3 For the Decoration Program of illuminated Ashkenazi prayer books, see Sed-Rajna (1983); Shalev-Eyni (2010, 21–31).

been clarified (Cluse 2000, 10:26–27). From the beginning, they lived mainly at the foot of Coudenberg Castle, one of the central parts of the walled city and the primary residence of the duke, to whom they were subjected. Already in 1300, the *Jodentrappen* (stairs of the Jews), in the vicinity of the ducal castle of Coudenberg, are mentioned in a written document, pointing to a clearer status (2000, 10:26–27). The same area housed some public buildings mentioned in later sources, among them the synagogue (where later on, in 1370, Jews would be martyred after being accused of desecrating the Host; Cluse 2000, 10:39–40). Around 1300, the duchy of Brabant absorbed some Jewish immigrants who had been expelled from England and France in 1290 and 1306 (2000, 10:31). These immigrants may have included the family of Isaac the scribe, the son of Elijah, the cantor of the Jewish community of Oxenfurt (Oxford) who, in 1309 in Brussels, completed a liturgical Pentateuch for one Hayyim the son of Hayyim, who was martyred, probably before the birth of his son.⁴ The codex, intended for personal use, includes the weekly biblical portions read in the synagogue. It was probably carried by Hayyim to the prayer hall and used by him when the Torah was ritually read aloud. Each verse of the text is written in both Hebrew and Aramaic, reflecting the ancient custom that required each member of the community to read each verse of the portion twice in Hebrew and once in Aramaic, in parallel with the public reading.⁵ The main text is accompanied by the commentary of Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, 1040–1105), the well-known French commentator, which was regarded by some thirteenth-century authorities as a substitute for the Aramaic translation.⁶ Isaac the scribe, the son of Elijah, the cantor who left a detailed colophon at the end of the manuscript, was responsible for copying both the main text and the commentary.⁷ A second scribe then added the grammatical notes of the *masora*, designing some of the texts in different shapes and using the technique of *carmina figurata* to fill the inner space of the shapes with the text.

A third scribe-illuminator, who left a second colophon below that of the main scribe, completed the work of both the illumination and the text, including proofreading and coloring. [4]

I, *Akud ha-Mor*, will thank the Lord of the Universe. I completed the painting and writing...⁸ [5]

This scribe-illuminator, probably another Isaac, does not mention his name specifically but uses the phrase *Akud ha-Mor*, meaning “[the] Bound of the *Mor*.” *Mor* is a poetic abbreviation for Mount Moriah, the site of Isaac’s binding on the altar by his father according to the Lord’s commandment (Genesis 22, 2). This phrase is derived from liturgical hymns referring to Isaac’s binding, such as the liturgical hymn for Passover “I will perform Music and Songs” (*Afik renen veshirim*), written by Meshulam ben Kalonimus, who uses the phrase “the (ances- [6]

4 Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Levy 19; Róth and Striedl (1984); Metzger (1976, 32–53; 1982, figs. 34, 49, 325); Wandrey (2014, 29–33); Engel and Beit-Arié (2017, No. 40).

5 “Rabbi Huna ben Judah says in the name of Rabbi Ammi: A man should always complete his weekly periscopes together with the congregation, [reading] twice the Hebrew text and once the [Aramaic] Targum’ (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhoth 8a). English, *Babylonian Talmud* 1935–1948, vol. Zera’im, Berakhoth, 42. In medieval Ashkenaz, some used to conduct the private recitation during the public reading in the synagogue. Others preceded the public reading by an individual recitation either at home or in the synagogue. For the different formats of French and Ashkenazi Pentateuch manuscripts of that period, reflecting different customs, see Shalev-Eyni (2010, 9–10).

6 The recommendation first appeared in the mid-thirteenth century *Sefer Mizvot Gadol* written by Rabbi Moses of Coucy: “I discussed in the presence of my elders that the commentary [of Rashi] is more useful than the translation and thus my elders instructed...” (see Gross 1993, 37–39).

7 Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Levy 19, fols. 624v–625r.

8 F. 625r. My translation.



Figure 1 Brussels Pentateuch, Brussels, 1309 (Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Levy 19, f. 34v)

tral) merit of the bound of *Mor*,” in the late tenth or early eleventh century (Davidson 1970, vol. 1, No. 1962; Hebrew text, Frankel 1993, 60).⁹

Some of the illustrations of the so called “Bound of *Mor*” appear as marginal annotations to the text; one of them depicts the binding of Isaac (1). Here, the naked Isaac is lying on his back above a pile of burning coals, which are arranged to form an altar-like shape. Isaac’s legs and hands are bound together, while Abraham pulls his son’s hair and brandishes his sword in preparation for the sacrifice. Abraham is turning back to an angel who appears from above, stopping him from doing so by holding the blade with one hand and pointing with the other to the ram, whose horns cling to the thicket.

The Jewish illuminator was acquainted with the local Christian iconography, as the inclusion, in this context, of the angel’s halo and the sword instead of the traditional Jewish knife shows.¹⁰ But he also included a unique component. Abraham wears a *tallit*, a prayer shawl, a rectangular piece of cloth with fringes attached to its four corners. At that time, the *tallit* was regarded as ritual attire, and wrapping oneself in the *tallit* was a ritual act related to prayer (Kogman-Appel 2012, 68–82). In Jewish corpora of biblical interpretations known as

9 Liturgical hymns are termed *piyyutim* (sing. *piyyut*). These were usually designated for recitation during public services and served to reinforce and verify the various events commemorated throughout the liturgical year. Different sorts of *piyyutim* are known according to their place in the prayer.

10 In Jewish sources, the Hebrew word *ma’ahlelet* meant knife and was translated as a knife in Aramaic versions of the Bible and the Septuagint. In the Vulgate it was translated as sword (*gladius*). As a result, while in Western art it was usually depicted as a sword, in Jewish art it was often depicted as a knife. The sword, however, is alluded to as a metaphor in some legendary sources. See the eighth-century *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. 31: “Rabbi Jehudah said: when the blade (*herev*, lit. sword) touched his neck the soul of Isaac fled and departed...” (*Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* 1981, 228). For the iconography of the scene in Jewish art, see Gutmann (1987). For the Ashkenazi domain, see Sabar (2009).

midrashim (sing. *midrash*) and Ashkenazi illuminations, the *tallit* became the attribute of the cantor in the synagogue (2012, 62–92). How can we understand the inclusion of this liturgical item in the biblical scene; what was its impact on the viewer and on the mechanism of the word-image collaboration?

In order to tackle these questions, one should start with the immediate context: the integration of the image and texts on the page. The marginal scene illustrates the biblical text of Isaac’s binding, written in the main column. A special reference is made to the last verse of the narrative, “And Abraham named that place (where the event took place) ‘The Lord will see’” (Genesis 22, 14). In the written text of the commentary interwoven within the image, Rashi, who traditionally identifies Mount Moriah as the place of the Temple, goes on to explain this verse also in the context of the generations living after its destruction: [9]

“The Lord will see”, its plain meaning is as the *Targum*¹¹ renders it: The Lord selects and sees for himself this place, to cause to dwell in it His Divine Presence and to offer here sacrifices...“To this day”, (means) future days...for all the coming generations that read this verse, say, “until this day” in reference **to the day in which they are living**... The Lord will see this binding to forgive Israel **every year** and to rescue them from trouble so that it shall be said “on this day” in all coming generations, “on the mountain of the Lord is seen”, the ashes of Isaac heaped up and serving for atonement.” (Rashi’s commentary on Genesis 22, 2; English, Ben Isaiah and Sharfman 1949, 1:205–6, my emphasis) [10]

By the use of the words “to this day” to represent the future days of all the generations to come, Rashi transfers the biblical narrative from past to present. By using the time frame of “every year” in the context of the Lord’s forgiveness of Israel due to the binding of Isaac, Rashi locates the event in the liturgical frame of the New Year (*Rosh Ha-Shanah*), the annual Day of Judgment according to the Jewish calendar.¹² In this two-day liturgical event, the biblical narrative of Isaac’s binding is the leitmotif, viewing the obedience of Abraham to God’s demand as an ancestral merit, working in favor of the people of Israel who stand in judgment on that day every year. The biblical text of this narrative is read on the second day of the feast as part of the public ceremony. Allusions to the narrative as well as citations and phrases derived from the biblical verses and exegetical interpretations of them were incorporated in many liturgical hymns sung throughout the day. The special prayer ceremonies also include the ritual of blowing the *shofar*, traditionally made of a ram’s horn to allude to the biblical event that concluded with the sacrifice of a ram instead of Isaac. [11]

Some European Christians of the time of Rashi, and the later illuminator of the Brussels Pentateuch, were aware of the Jewish interpretation of the biblical event and its liturgical context. It was Jerome in his *Hebraice Quaestiones in Libro Geneseos*, a treatise explaining linguistic aspects of his translation, who already directly referred to the Jewish interpretation of Genesis 22, 14. His work was quoted by Rabanus Maurus in his *Commentariorum in Genesim Libri Quatuor*, and finally, indirectly through Rabanus, was recited in the name of Jerome as [12]

11 *Targum* refers to Targum Onkelos, the early-second-century Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch, which was officially accepted for ritual reading. This was also the version that was included in Pentateuch manuscripts such as the Brussels Pentateuch.

12 See the Palestinian *Pesikta Rabati*, originating between the sixth and ninth centuries. In its final form it was based on the Jewish liturgical calendar and was well known in France during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Here the liturgical translation of the biblical scene was given further emphasis by referring to the New Year as the date on which Isaac’s binding took place (No. 40). For the Hebrew text, see *Pesikta Rabbati* (1889, 171a). For an English translation, see *Pesikta* (1968, 720).

an authoritative source in the *Glossa Ordinaria* (Schoenfeld 2013, 67–68). The Ordinary Gloss, the standard biblical commentary in Western Europe (Migne 1852, vol. 113, cols. 137–39), was compiled in the school of Laon during the twelfth century by various scholars; prominent among them is Gilbert of Poitiers (1075/80–1154), who was responsible for the commentary on the Pentateuch.

...Although it says here “He will see”, in the Hebrew it is written “He will be seen”. This among the Hebrews has emerged as a proverb, when they are found in crisis, and wishing to be freed by divine aid, they say: “the lord will be seen on the mountain.” That is, just as Abraham was granted mercy so may He be merciful to us. They are also accustomed to sound the horn, a symbol for the ram that was sacrificed (marginal gloss to Genesis 22, 14).¹³ [13]

Jews were also aware of the Christian interpretation of the biblical event. The concept of atonement, mentioned by Rashi and already found in the earlier exegetical tradition, might be understood as a polemic answer to the central notion of Christianity’s perception of the Crucifixion of Christ, typologically embodied in the biblical narrative of Isaac’s Binding, as an act of atonement for the sins of mankind. This notion followed by Rashi adopted a concept of atonement opposed to the Christian concept of atonement, turning the one-time Christological penitence into an annual repentance for the sins of Israel. Rashi, however, went a step beyond the traditional Jewish interpretation. While according to the Bible and its basic Jewish understanding Isaac was, in the end, not sacrificed, Rashi describes “Isaac’s ashes, heaped up on the mountain” as if the sacrifice had actually taken place. [14]

The notion of “Isaac’s ashes” already appears in various compilations of *midrashim*, dated from the fifth century onward. However, while the literary image of the ashes is usually presented as a clear metaphor, “as if they are heaped up upon the altar,”¹⁴ Rashi’s version appears without the words “as if” (Signer 2003). Dropping these two words may significantly change the meaning. Without them, “The ashes of Isaac” are no longer a mere literary image. The result seems to diverge greatly from the direct meaning of the biblical text and move closer to the Christian concept of a real sacrifice of a son. This ambiguous change finds parallels in some liturgical hymns dedicated to the narrative of Isaac’s binding, a number of which were written in circles well known to Rashi; these may have served as a background for his approach. One is a *penitential poem*, “The covenant and the kindness” (Davidson 1970, vol. I, No. 8517; Goldschmidt 1970a, II:636–37), for the Day of Atonement, by eleventh-century Meir bar Isaac, the famous emissary (*shaliah zibbur*) of Worms, an expert on liturgy and a composer of hymns which have become an integral part of the Ashkenazi rite (Grossman 1988, 292–96). Rashi, who studied as a young scholar in Worms, mentions with respect Rabbi Meir’s name in relation to liturgical issues (Grossman 1988, 293). Rabbi Meir’s work was based on the same exegetical tradition and, like Rashi, deleted the metaphoric words “as if”: [15]

Please, the respectful and blessed Holy Name
Will see, will be seen at the top of the House of Your glory [16]

13 Latin and English (Schoenfeld 2013, 150 and 160, No. 14.1m). The compiler refers to the Jewish interpretation in an apologetic way by concluding with a quotation of Isidore’s commentary (*Questiones in Vetus testamentum–In Genesim*, ch. 18, 3-19): “Therefore after Abraham sacrificed Isaac his son, he called the name of this place ‘The Lord saw’, which is ‘The Lord caused to be seen’ that is through the incarnation” (ibid., 151 and 160, No. 14.2m).

14 See e.g. the fifth- or sixth-century Leviticus Rabbah (36, 5): “...He saw Isaac’s ashes, as if they are heaped up upon the altar” (Hebrew text, *Midrash Rabbah* 1887, v. 2, *Vayikra* 36, 5).

Isaac his only son,
His ashes are piled up and bound... (Hebrew text, Goldschmidt 1970a, II:636)¹⁵

In later generations, the image of an actual sacrifice became even more prominent and widespread. The biblical narrative served as a model for twelfth-century chronicles, penitential poems, and dirges commemorating the righteous people who, during the massacres of the Crusades (1096), rather than accepting forced baptism killed their children (and committed suicide) as an act of Sanctification of the Name. These writings, clearly alluding to an actual sacrifice, also influenced other liturgical hymns telling the story of Isaac's binding (see Spiegel 1979, 18, 130–38).¹⁶ [17]

Inspired by a similar diversity of well-known versions written before and after 1096, and perhaps also by the most recent persecutions by crusaders in neighboring communities of Brabant during his own period (1309) (Avneri 1968, II:100), the scribe-illuminator of the Brussels Pentateuch created a powerful visual variation (1). He literally merged Rashi's commentary with the image by surrounding the written words "for atonement" with red burning coals, suggesting a play on the thin border between a real sacrifice and a metaphor. By introducing the *tallit*, the prayer shawl, which was not part of the visual tradition of the scene, he emphasized the Jewish liturgical understanding of the concept of atonement.¹⁷ The wearing of the *tallit* connects Abraham with prayer and transfers the biblical scene to the public liturgical domain. Furthermore, it fuses the two realms: the biblical and the liturgical. The obedient Abraham, who prays for the sake of his heirs in the future, is also the present-day cantor who mediates between the congregation and the Lord, begging for mercy for the whole community. It is thus the crucial integration in the image of the *tallit*, a visual component derived from the liturgical domain of the viewer, which had the power to totally blur the differences between the biblical past and the present liturgical service. This conflation occurred while the devotee was listening to the public reading, and at the same time following the text and looking at the image in his book. [18]

Esslingen: A Jewish-Christian Operation

The illuminator of the Brussels Pentateuch was a well-educated Jewish scholar whose knowledge enabled him to suggest a sophisticated word-image operation reflecting the merging of the biblical and liturgical realms in the synagogue which were an integral part of his everyday life. However, what happened when the illuminator had a different background, a Christian one with associations of the Christian liturgical understanding of the same scene? To analyze such an example, let us turn to another liturgical manuscript, leading us to another geo-cultural area—Esslingen, situated on the Neckar River. [19]

While the medieval city of Brussels left almost no remnants, Esslingen preserved much of its past. Esslingen was an imperial city, having received official city rights under Emperor [20]

15 See the shortened citation of the image without the words "as if" in the Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 62b, Zevahim 62a and Taanit 16a.

16 For possible artistic expressions, see Sabar (2009). For differences between poetic material written before and after the Crusades, see Elizur (1997). According to Avraham Frankel, some of these notions were already present in *piyyutim* written in Italy and Ashkenaz prior to the Crusades (cf. Grossman 2017, 231–39).

17 He may also have been aware of Rabbi Meir's *piyyut* and the midrashic source on which it was based, where a *tallit*, in this case referring to a garment instead of a prayer shawl, is mentioned in relation to the ram sacrificed instead of Isaac.

Frederick II in 1229. The following decades were a time of financial prosperity (in which the Jews also played a part¹⁸), construction boom, and artistic activity, which reached its peak around 1300 (Becksmann 1997). The synagogue, first mentioned in a document dated 1268, was located between Hafenmarkt and Strohstrasse not far from St. Dionys, the parish church (Becksmann 1997, 33–86). In December 1348, a pogrom erupted during which the synagogue was set on fire with the community members inside (Veitshans 1970, V:19), but some prayer books ascribed to Esslingen remain to testify to the integration that existed prior to the massacre.¹⁹

One of them is a large *maḥzor* (lit. cycle), a public prayer book for the special Sabbaths and feasts throughout the liturgical year, which was intended for the cantor's use during his conducting of the public service in the synagogue. It was bound in two volumes, which are housed today in Dresden and Wrocław.²⁰ The Dresden-Wrocław Maḥzor has no colophon, but a number of comments by the scribe allow us to date it between 1290 and 1293.²¹ Like the scribe of the Brussels Pentateuch, the scribe of this Maḥzor was well-educated. Although we do not know him by name, we do have information in the manuscripts concerning his well-known teachers: Rabbi Meir ben Baruch of Rothenberg (c. 1215–1293), the main authority of Ashkenazi Jewry in the second half of the thirteenth century (Dresden, f. 285r and Wrocław, f. 130v), and Eleazar the preacher of Würzburg (d. 1286; Dresden, f. 283r.), whose tombstone was recently discovered (Müller et al. 2012, No. 324/659). [21]

In Esslingen, Jewish and Christian artisans were working together in the field of manuscript production. Jewish craftsmen were members in the guild of parchment makers (Möncke 1982, 170, No. 9; Haverkamp 2012b, 85–86, 2012a, 218–19), a unique situation which probably occurred in this specific case due to their high reputation in the field. At the same time, Christian artists were hired to illuminate Hebrew manuscripts; the Dresden-Wrocław Maḥzor among them. [22]

In the liturgical hymn “For who can do according to Thy works?” (*Asher mi ya’aseh kema’asekha*) for the second day of the New Year, the annual Day of Judgment (Davidson 1970, vol. I, No. 8307; for the Hebrew text, see Goldschmidt 1970b, I:112–21),²² the scribe of this manuscript copied, in large lettering, the entire phrase “And You shall remember the sacrifice of Isaac as You vowed and You shall change the measurement of judgement to one of mercy” (Hebrew text, Goldschmidt 1970b, I:114). After copying the section, the scribe left an empty space for an illustration of Isaac's sacrifice that would give even more weight to the meaning of the stressed words (2).²³ The concept of the willingness of Abraham as ancestral merit has its most salient expression in this liturgical hymn. The hymn describes how, at the very moment when God is about to pass judgement on them, the people of Israel pray to him to remember the merit of their ancestor Abraham, embodied in the ten trials he underwent, the tenth and most difficult of them being the sacrifice of Isaac. [23]

18 For Jews in Medieval Esslingen, see *Germania Judaica* (1968, II:227–32); Veitshans (1970, V:18–20).

19 For the group of four manuscripts originating in or ascribed to Esslingen, see Sed-Rajna (1983, 15–16); Schrijver (1987); Beit-Arié (1988); Cohen and Schrijver (1991).

20 Wrocław, OR. I,1 and Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek MS. A 46a.

21 See the colophon dated 1290 of the New York-Rosenthaliana prayer book (New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, MS.MIC. 9344 and Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Hs. Ros. 609) as well as the reference to Rabbi Meir ben Baruch (died 1293) with the benediction for the deceased in the Dresden manuscript (f. 285r). For the term “*Medinat Esslingen*” (district of Esslingen) mentioned in the colophon of the Rosenthaliana manuscript, see Barzen (2013).

22 The opening words of the hymn are based on Deuteronomy 3, 24.

23 Wrocław Maḥzor, Esslingen, between 1290 and 1293; Wrocław, State and University Library, Ms. Or. I,1, f. 46v.



Figure 2 Wroclaw Mahzor, Esslingen, between 1290 and 1293 (Wroclaw, State and University Library, Ms. Or. I 1, f. 46v)

In the center of the upper section of the illustration, the young Isaac is laid on the altar, standing on the mountaintop. Isaac's eyes are covered by one of Abraham's hands as he holds a sword in the other. He turns his head back towards the angel on the right, who, like in the Brussels illumination, holds the blade in one hand and points to the ram caught in the thicket, seen below him. To the left of the altar is a candlestick holding a large candle. To its side, the previous episode is depicted: Abraham takes his son by the arm on his way to the top of the mountain. He turns his head back and points forward, indicating to the son the candlestick and the place of the sacrifice. [24]

The candlestick bearing the large candle, placed to the side of the altar, derives from the Christian tradition. Liturgical candles usually accompany depictions of Christian altars of the time, being placed either on them or alongside them.²⁴ A large candle next to the altar represents the candle of Easter (Mellinkoff 1999, 44–45). Every year the Easter eve ritual in the church includes taking a light from the new fire and lighting the large candle that symbolizes the light of Christ rising from the dead (see e.g. Avery 1936, pls. CXX, CXXVIII). The placement of this Easter candle alongside the altar where Isaac is to undergo sacrifice identifies it as the altar of the Church, symbolizing the sacrifice of Christ and hinting at the Christological significance of Isaac's sacrifice. As we have seen, the Christian tradition gave the story of Isaac's sacrifice a typological interpretation, seeing in Isaac the prefiguration of Christ who, through his crucifixion, atoned for the sins of mankind (Daniélou 1960, 363–93). [25]

In keeping with the fundamental Christological interpretation of the Binding as the Crucifixion, the altar on which Isaac was laid was also understood, in a direct liturgical context, to symbolize the altar of the Eucharist in the Church (Schoenfeld 2013, 101). The interlinear gloss of the *Glossa Ordinaria* explains the verse “And they came to the place which God had shown him, where he built an altar” (22: 9), as follows: “This is a symbol of the altar on which is consecrated the body and blood of Christ” (Schoenfeld 2013, 158, No. 91i). For a Christian artist, the altar and the candlestick belonged to the same ecclesiastic repertoire referring to the sacrifice of Christ. [26]

Probably inspired by the Christian surroundings, candles made of wax (without the altar) were part of the medieval Ashkenazi liturgy as well, especially during the feasts of the New Year and the Day of Atonement. Furthermore, according to one contemporary source, in front of the Torah ark in the synagogue of Nuremberg a wax candle burned day and night.²⁵ Thus, for an Ashkenazi viewer, the inclusion of a candle in the biblical scene would have connected it with the liturgical present he was probably experiencing in the synagogue. The combination of a liturgical candle and an altar was, however, foreign to the Jewish liturgy, and neither was it related to Isaac's sacrifice. This being the case, how are we to understand its presence in the Jewish context? A partial answer appears in the liturgical hymn itself. [27]

And when they reached Zofim they saw a tall flame/And he [Abraham] understood that this is the mountain to climb.../And with His finger He [the Lord] showed him the altar of the One who dwells on High.../The “only son” [Isaac] ordered that his hands and feet be bound to the foot (of the altar).²⁶ [28]

The poet based the verses of the hymn on the eighth-century Midrash Pirkei de Rabbi [29]

24 See e.g. Codex Manesse, ca. 1300–1340; Heidelberg, Univ. Bibl., CPG 848, f. 48v; Walther and Siebert (1988, 43 and pl. 21).

25 See the Nuremberg *Memorbuch*, whose earlier part was written around 1296 and before 1298, f. 53r; Salfeld (1898, 3:88). Such a candle may have been part of other Ashkenazi synagogues as well.

26 Wrocław, f. 48r. Hebrew text, Goldschmidt (1970b, I:120). My translation.

Eliezer, a well-known source in medieval Ashkenaz. Here, a more direct and explicit version appears:

In the third day they reached Zofim and when they reached Zofim they saw the glory of the Shekhinah resting upon the mountain as it is said: In the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw from afar (Genesis 22, 4). What did he see? A **pillar of fire** standing from the earth to heaven...The Holy one blessed be He pointed out the altar with a finger to Abraham...Isaac said to his father Abraham: “O my father, bind my two hands and my two feet, so that I do not curse thee.”²⁷ [30]

While for the Christian illuminator, the image of the liturgical candle in the context of the sacrifice suggested the typological Christological meaning of Isaac’s altar, for the Jew it constituted an appropriate replacement for the pillar of fire mentioned in the Jewish exegesis. We can assume that the scribe of the Dresden-Wroclaw Maḥzor, who emphasized the words of the liturgical hymn and left space for its illumination within the body of the text, was also the mediator between the Christian artist in the urban workshop and the details of the hymn and its well-known source, including the pillar of fire seen by Abraham and Isaac. If so, why would a Christian liturgical item have been chosen to represent the Jewish exegetical component? It would appear that the answer to this question lies in the Jewish-Christian collaboration on the production of the illustration. The Christian illuminator received precise instructions from the scribe who dictated the details. The artist interpreted the instructions of the Jewish guide in his own, Christian, terms. The Jewish request to depict a pillar of fire alongside the altar immediately recalled to him the giant Easter candle, symbolizing the light of Christ, the resurrected sacrifice. This association between the pillar of fire and the liturgical Easter candle was not a figment of the artist’s imagination. It derives directly from the Christian ritual. When the Easter candle was lit and placed in its proper position, the deacon would sing the Exultet, in which the Pillar of Fire and the Easter candle merge:²⁸ [31]

Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven,
exult, let Angel ministers of God exult,
let the trumpet of salvation
sound aloud our mighty King’s triumph... [32]

This is the night,
when once you led our forebears, Israel’s children,
from slavery in Egypt
and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea. [33]

This is the night
that with a **pillar of fire**
banished the darkness of sin. [34]

But now we know the praises of this pillar,
which glowing fire ignites for God’s honor,
a fire into many flames divided, [35]

27 Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer ch. 31. Hebrew text, *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* (1852, 56–58, my emphasis). English translation, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* (1981, 225–27). See Sed-Rajna (1987, 44, No. 38).

28 For the ceremony, see the Exultet Rolls, e.g. Avery (1936); Cavallo (1994); Kelly (1996).

yet never dimmed by sharing of its light,
for it is fed by melting wax,
drawn out by mother bees
to build a torch so precious.

O truly blessed night,
when things of heaven are wed to those of earth,
and divine to the human.

[36]

Therefore, O Lord,
we pray you that this **candle**,
hallowed to the honor of your name,
may persevere undimmed,
to overcome the darkness of this night.

[37]

Receive it as a pleasing fragrance,
and let it mingle with the lights of heaven.

[38]

May this flame be found still burning
by the Morning Star:
the one Morning Star who never sets,
Christ your Son,
who, coming back from death's domain,
has shed his peaceful light on humanity,
and lives and reigns for ever and ever.²⁹

[39]

The Christian concept equating the Paschal candle with the Pillar of Fire may explain the choice of the Christian illuminator to represent the pillar of fire next to the altar on top of the mountain as the liturgical candle of Easter. For a Christian devotee joining the Vigil service in the local church at Easter, this would have been a natural association.

[40]

Here, like in the Brussels Pentateuch, the biblical narrative and the liturgical ceremony are combined in a tangible way. This time, however, echoes of Christian liturgy found their way into the Jewish liturgical realm.

[41]

Conclusion

The images in both the Brussels Pentateuch and the Dresden-Wroclaw prayer book are integrated within the ritual domain of the synagogue, which is restricted to the local Jewish community members, a specific group of a certain religion (1 and 2). In this ritual frame, they are integrated with liturgical attires and gestures as well as a broad selection of words: Scripture, hymns, commentaries, and sermons. Some of these texts are written on the actual manuscripts and spoken or sung in the ritual inner space. Others are additional, written and oral, traditions known to differing degrees to the community members. These are all connected to one another in a dynamic web whose center is the image and text on the page of the sacred liturgical manuscripts used by the cantor to conduct the ceremony, and by those

[42]

29 <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/easter/easter-proclamation-exsultet.cfm> (last accessed January 20, 2020; my emphasis).

members of the community who were able to follow the prayers in their own personal illuminated copies (cf. Morgan 2014, 93–98).

Visuality played a central role in enlivening the prayers by giving a tangible expression to the biblical narratives recited in the public ceremony. The integration of visual components identified with material objects used in the prayer hall—the *tallit* and the wax candle—which were not part of the original biblical narrative went a step further. It blurred the gap between the historical event and the liturgical ceremony, and by so doing intensified the religious experience of the devotee and his identification with his ancestors, the protagonists of the biblical events that formed a central part in the liturgy. [43]

Visuality was also a main channel through which some foreign concepts, products of the mixed urban reality, were entering Jewish prayer hall. As in the case of the altar-candle combination, such concepts could have infiltrated the Jewish ritual domain in a direct, tangible way, through images made by Christian artists.³⁰ The results exemplify the intimate relations between the two religious experiences in the shared urban domain, where the synagogue existed in close proximity to local churches. [44]

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30 For more case studies pointing to the cooperation between Jews and Christians in producing Hebrew manuscripts and supporting the same conclusion, see Shalev-Eyni (2010) and Shalev-Eyni (2016).

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