

The Temple of Jerusalem and the Hebrew Millennium in a Thirteenth-Century Jewish Prayer Book¹

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The holiday of Shavuot, the feast of Weeks, originally an agricultural holiday, is primarily associated with the Giving of the Law on Mount Sinai (*Exodus* 31:18) believed to have taken place on that day. It is thus only quite natural that this particular scene should accompany the first page of the Shavuot liturgy in Jewish illuminated prayer books of the Middle Ages. A typical example occurs in the *Tripartite Mahzor* produced around 1320 in the region of Constance (fig. 1).² The illustrated prayer *Adon Imnani* – *The Lord has Nourished me* is a hymn sung so to speak by the *Torah*, the law itself, poetically defining the role the law plays in Israel. The image in the *Tripartite Mahzor* is in many ways typical for the most common approach to illustration in the genre of Ashkenazi prayer books. Illuminated Mahzorim often follow a very literal, linear approach to illustration and refer to the main theme of the holiday or the displayed liturgical hymn in the most straightforward and clear manner possible.

The Giving of the Law is also represented in the so-called *Laud Mahzor*, now in the Bodleian Library, a book written and illuminated in southern Germany, perhaps in Franconia, around the middle of the thirteenth century (fig. 2).³ The upper part of the miniature shows the Sinai event. An angel on the left holds two tablets of the law, which, on the right, are transmitted as a *Torah* scroll to three bird-headed representatives of the people of Israel.⁴ Unlike the miniature in the *Tripartite Mahzor* and other parallels⁵, the

¹ This article forms part of a project supported by a research grant from the Israel Science Foundation: *The Cultural History of Illuminated Hebrew Prayer Books from Medieval Germany* (grant no. 756/03).

² For research on the *Tripartite Mahzor*, see Sarit Shalev Eyni: *The Tripartite Mahzor* (in Hebrew, Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Jerusalem 2001, with reference to earlier literature.

³ The *Laud Mahzor* has not received much scholarly attention, see discussions in Bezalel Narkiss: *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*, Jerusalem 1984 (revised edition of the English version Jerusalem 1969, in Hebrew), p. 121; Gabrielle Sed Rajna: *Le Mahzor enluminé. Les voies de formation d'un programme iconographique*, Leiden 1983, pp. 14, 64-66.

⁴ Much has been written on this phenomenon in German Jewish art. It appears around the middle of the 13th century and can be observed as a rather typical feature until the middle of the 14th, when it suddenly disappears entirely. Other iconographic means of avoiding the human face, such as leaving the faces empty or covering them with hair, developed in parallel. It is believed, for example, that the group of Israelites in the lower part of the *Laud Mahzor* miniature, on the right, originally had their faces left empty and that the

Laud Mahzor image somewhat marginalizes the Giving of the Law, squeezing it into the uppermost part of a full-page composition. The main focus of the imagery appears within a large arch circumscribing the opening word of the liturgical hymn *Adon* (the Lord) which is placed between two horizontal beams that form part of the architectural structure of the arch. Looking through the arch the spectator witnesses a sacrifice performed in the space above the upper horizontal beam. Diverging from the literal approach pursued in other Ashkenazi prayer books, this image of the *Laud Mahzor* thus presents a sophisticated system of juxtapositions of different subject matters – mainly the law, the sacrificial cult, and the locale of the cult – calling for a different kind of reading.

Earlier scholarship interpreted the depicted sacrifice as the one described in *Exodus* 24:3-8.⁶ The preceding chapters recount the arrival of the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai, and the communication between God and Moses on the subject of Israel being the chosen people. Israel accepts the law before it actually receives it. At the end of this part, in chapter 24, Moses, having heard the words of the Lord and written them down in the Book of the Covenant (verse 4), builds an altar at the foot of the mountain and sends young men to sacrifice bulls (verse 5). Then the Book of the Covenant is read to the assembly (verse 7), and the blood of the sacrificial bulls is flung over the people as “the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you on the terms of this book” (verse 8).

faces were added later, Narkiss 1984 (as in n. 3), p. 121. For attempts to interpret the phenomenon, see Kurt and Ursula Schubert: *Jüdische Buchkunst*, vol. I, Graz 1984, pp. 72-73, who assumed that it had to do with halakhic restrictions concerning artistic representations. Other interpretations have been made by scholars who believe that the animal features are meant to positively single out certain social groups, as the Israelites themselves, see Zofia Ameisenova: Animal Headed Gods, Evangelists, Saints and Righteous Men, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 12, 1949, pp. 21-45; Meir Ayali: Halakhah and Aggadah in Haggadah Illustrations (in Hebrew), in: *Alei Siach*, 15/16, 1982, pp. 262-263; Bezalel Narkiss: On the Zoocephalic Phenomenon in Mediaeval Ashkenazi Manuscripts, in: *Norms and Variations in Art. Hebrew University Studies in Literature and Art. Special Issue in Honor of Moshe Barasch*, Jerusalem 1983, pp. 214-236; Thérèse and Mendel Metzger: Méir ben Barukh de Rothembourg et la question des images chez les Juifs au moyen âge, in: *Aschkenas – Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der Juden*, 1, 1994, pp. 59-60.

⁵ Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, MS. A 46a, fol. 202v, Sed Rajna 1983 (as in n. 3), fig. 40; in the *Worms Mahzor* the illustration appears in the upper margin, is badly cropped and hardly discernable, Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library, cod. 4°781, vol. 1, fol. 151v, <http://www.jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/mss/worms/> (June 1, 2008), for a facsimile edition of the *Worms Mahzor*, see *The Worms Mahzor, Jewish National and University Library, MS heb. 4°781/1*, ed. by Malachi Beit-Arié, Vaduz 1986. In the Hammelburg Mahzor, Darmstadt, Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, ms Or. 13, fol. 126r, Moses is shown presenting the law.

⁶ Narkiss 1984 (as in n. 3), p. 121; Sed Rajna 1983 (as in n. 3), p. 27.

This reading treats the *Laud* imagery as a straightforward visual rendering of a biblical narrative – the giving of the law and the subsequent sacrifice. However, it leaves some questions open: first, the pictorial function of the arch which dominates the composition; second, the animal on the altar is actually a ram and not a bull; third, the young men who are supposed to perform the sacrifice are not shown; fourth, given the stress on the public reading of the Book of the Covenant, one would expect the latter to play some, if not a major role in the composition. Parallels of this theme in Christian art incorporate the reading of the Book of the Covenant as a central part in the imagery. Examples can be found in sixth century Italy in the *Ashburnham Pentateuch*⁷, or later in the Carolingian Bibles from Tours (fig. 3).⁸ An inclusion of the reading of the Book of the Covenant in the *Laud Mahzor* imagery could have provided the rationale behind the juxtaposition of the sacrifice and the Sinai scene. Moreover, it would have offered the necessary link to the law and the Shavuot holiday.

Before I offer an alternative reading of the sacrificial scene, the arch deserves a closer look. Determining the locale of the sacrifice, it provides a key to its understanding. The representation of an arch is, I suggest, reminiscent of the most common symbol of the Temple of Jerusalem, the desert Tabernacle, and the Ark of the Covenant – or, rather, all three notions combined. It echoes the well-known symbolic shape of a structure rectangular at the base with a curved top. Elisheva Revel-Neher has demonstrated that this symbolic shape dominated Jewish art, especially of the late antique period.⁹ The angular lower part is a graphic sign that developed from the shape of the Ark, whereas the curved top represents the lid, the *kapporet* with the two Cherubim on top (*Exodus* 25:17-18). Revel-Neher shows how this structure, first discernable in a group of tetrachma coins from the Bar-Kokhba period (132-135, fig. 4) developed into a more abstract and stylized shape in later representations. In the Bar-Kokhba coins the shape

⁷ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Nouv. Acq. Lat. 2334, fol. 76r; for a recently published facsimile, see *El Pentateuco Ashburnham: la ilustración de codices en la Antigüedad Tardía*, Facsimile Edition, introd. by Bezalel Narkiss, Valencia 2007; for a contextualizing discussion of the Pentateuch in general and this image in particular, see Dorothy H. Verkerk: *Early Medieval Bible Illumination and the Ashburnham Pentateuch*, Cambridge (UK) 2004, esp. pp. 89-102, fig. 21.

⁸ On the Tournon Bibles, see Herbert L. Kessler: *The Illustrated Bibles from Tours*, (Studies in Manuscript Illumination, 7), Princeton 1977.

⁹ Elisabeth Revel Neher: *L'Arche d'Alliance dans l'art juif et chrétien du second au dixième siècles: le signe de la rencontre*, Paris 1984.

stands for the Ark of the Covenant; it is placed below a small temple structure, and expresses the acute messianic (and political) hope that the Temple, destroyed about sixty years earlier, will be rebuilt. In a mural from the synagogue in Dura Europos from 244/245 the ark symbol turns into a shrine-like structure placed within the Temple, indicating that the synagogal Torah shrine parallels the Ark of the Covenant (fig. 5). In a tomb stone from the fifth century found in Kfar Yassif, for example, the same symbol appears in what had by now developed into a most common convention. It figures on its own, detached from the small temple structure. It had thus turned into a yet more abstract sign juxtaposed with the Menorah, indicating that these two are the central symbols of the Jewish religion and messianic expectation. Revel-Neher and Shulamit Laderman have demonstrated that the symbol was also adopted in Christian art.¹⁰ In the Middle Ages it can occasionally be observed that this same symbol had developed into an arch functioning as a frame opening onto the space where a sacrifice is taking place. Examples are known from Castile, Navarre, and Aragon, in both Christian and Jewish contexts (fig. 6). In the Sarajevo Haggadah from ca. 1330, the arch opens onto the Holy of Holies (fig. 7).

In the *Laud Mahzor* the upper edge of the arch appears to represent the curved line of Mount Sinai as if to identify the arch with the Mount. The little stylized green plant perched on the edge of the arch seems to turn it into a part of nature – a mountain. This is based on several Rabbinic traditions that imply an identification of Mount Sinai with Mount Moriah, the site of the Binding of Isaac, and the Temple Mount.¹¹

The arch thus takes us beyond the plain biblical narrative into the more complex layers of this imagery. The locale of the depicted sacrifice is either the Tabernacle or the Temple, two notions – one referring to the temporary movable sanctuary, the other to the permanent structure – that cannot be separated. The arch and the beams in the color of limestone, with realistic architectural details, indicate that the designer of the composition

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, fig. 34 ; for further background on the imagery of Temple, see Elisabeth Revel-Neher: *Le témoignage de l'absence. Les objets du sanctuaire à Byzance et dans l'art juif du XIe au XVe siècle*, Paris 1998; Shulamit Laderman: 'Ma-aseh Ha-Mishkan' and 'Ma-aseh Breshit' – *The Pentateuchal Tabernacle: a Symbolic Model of the Creation of the World, as Found in Jewish and Byzantine-Christian Iconography* (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2000), Jerusalem 2000.

¹¹ *Midrash Tehillim hamekhune shocheh tov on Ps 68:15*, ed. by Solomon Buber, Vilnius 1890, p. 320; for an English translation, see *Midrash on Psalms*, ed. and trans. by William G. Braude, vol. I, New Haven 1959, p. 544.

intended to represent the Temple. Bearing in mind that the sacrifice is shown within the sanctuary and not at the foot of the Mountain it quite probably refers to the account of the installation of the priesthood in *Exodus 29*, taking place after the erection of the desert Tabernacle and in front of it. This text mentions a bull and two rams, one of them referred to as the “ram of installation”; the account also implies that blood is sprinkled on the vestments of Aaron and his sons. *Exodus 29:23* also mentions bread and cakes, to which the marginal baking scene at the foot of the page might be a reference.¹² More likely, even this image is not a mere representation of this or that biblical narrative, as the arch is not a literal depiction of the desert Tabernacle, but rather stands for the locale of the sacrificial cult, the Temple of Jerusalem. The sacrificial scene may refer to the sacrificial cult as such. But the Temple is also the dwelling place of the *shekhinah*, the divine presence. This is indicated by the initial *Adon* (the Lord) between two beams, integral architectural parts of the structure, as if to emphasize the notion of the Temple as God’s dwelling place. A pictorial representation of God, however, is unthinkable in Jewish art.

The image in the *Laud Mahzor* is altogether unique and without any, even remote, iconographic parallels. This singularity can only be approached by contextualizing the imagery and reading it against the very specific cultural circumstances in which the image arose. Before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in the year 70, the sacrificial cult was the center of Jewish religious life. With the destruction of the Temple, the law, its study and teaching became the core of Jewish existence, a process frequently described by scholars of Rabbinic Judaism.¹³ The Temple destroyed as a physical entity survived as a spiritual focus and in the various acts of commemoration performed by Jews throughout the generations. The sacrificial function of the Temple

¹² The baking scene could also, however, be directly related to the Shavuot holiday and the bread made of the first wheat harvest.

¹³ See, for example, Stefan Schreiner: Wo man Tora lernt, braucht man keinen Tempel. Einige Anmerkungen zum Problem der Tempelsubstitution im rabbinischen Judentum, in: *Gemeinde ohne Tempel – Community without Temple. Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum*, ed. by Beate Ego/Armin Lange/Peter Pilhofer, Tübingen 1999, pp. 371-392; Ben Zion Rosenfeld: Sage and Temple in Rabbinic Thought After the Destruction of the Second Temple, in: *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, 28 (3), 1997, pp. 437-464; Rachel Elior: The Jerusalem Temple: The Representation of the Imperceptible, in: *Studies in Spirituality*, 11, 2001, pp. 126-143; Günter Stemmerger: Reaktionen auf die Tempelzerstörung in der rabbinischen Literatur, in: *Zerstörungen des Jerusalemer Tempels. Geschehen – Wahrnehmung – Bewältigung*, ed. by Johannes Hahn, Tübingen 2002, pp. 207-236.

was played down and the notions of the Temple as housing the *shekhinah*, the divine presence and the Ark of the Covenant became more central aspects. Almost 1200 years after the destruction of the Temple our image brings these two cores together, the law with its relevance for the holiday of Shavuot, on the one hand, and the Temple with the sacrificial cult, on the other. As all other Jewish visual representations of the sanctuary, the image depicts first of all the future messianic Temple. Different from other renderings of the messianic Temple, which present a somewhat abstract, primarily symbolical array of implements, the *Laud* image approaches the future sanctuary by means of its historical significance as the place where sacrifices were performed. The question of the relationship between the messianic and the historical Temple can only be approached by contextualizing the imagery. Bearing in mind that the future Temple lies at the center core of the imagery, I shall examine medieval Jewish attitudes to messianic expectations in general, and Ashkenazi preferences in particular. This will also address the question why the sacrificial cult is interwoven into the iconography, as if to encompass both the eschatological meaning of the Temple and its historical significance. The historical circumstances that led to these preferences will be taken into account and placed beside the imagery of the *Laud Mahzor* Shavuot page.

In the Middle Ages messianic expectations at first occupied primarily Sephardic scholars. In this cultural realm we encounter two basically different Jewish attitudes.¹⁴ The first, referred to by modern scholars as naturalistic or rationalistic approach, envisions the expected messianic events in terms of personal salvation, implying the restoration of what has vanished. There will be no dramatic events, such as pre-messianic wars and catastrophies, and the law will remain valid. The Temple will be physically rebuilt in Jerusalem by the people of Israel, and the sacrificial cult will be re-introduced.¹⁵

¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of these, see, exhaustively, Dov Schwartz: *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought*, Ramat Gan 1997 (in Hebrew); see also Moshe Idel: Concepts of Redemption in the Middle Ages (in Hebrew), in: *Messianism and Eschatology*, ed. by Zvi Brass, Jerusalem 1984, pp. 253-280; id., Jewish Apocalypticism: 670-1670, in: *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. by Bernard McGinn, vol. II, New York 1999, pp. 204-237; Karlheinz Müller: Wandlungen in der messianischen Erwartung des mittelalterlichen Judentums, in: *Geschichte und Kultur des Judentums. Eine Vorlesungsreihe an der Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg*, ed. by Karlheinz Müller/Klaus Wittstadt, Würzburg 1988, pp. 111-144; Joseph Dan: *Apocalypse Now and Then*, Herzliya 2000 (in Hebrew), chap. 3.

¹⁵ For details, see Schwartz 1997 (as in n. 14), pp. 16-17 and chap. 3; see also Johann Maier: 'Messianische Zeit' und 'Kommende Welt' in der Zukunftserwartung des Judentums, in: *Zukunftshoffnung und Heilserwartung in den monotheistischen Religionen* ed. by Abdoldjavad Falaturi/Walter Strolz/Shemaryahu

The most prominent representative of this approach was Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, commonly known as Maimonides (d. 1204). Maimonides' rationalist approach to messianism was pursued during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries by his followers in Iberia and southern France, such as Samuel ibn Tibbon and R. Abraham ben Moses, Maimonides' son.¹⁶

A group of depictions of the Temple in Sephardic Bibles from the late thirteenth century onwards reflects the Maimonidean concept of the Temple in numerous ways and, as I have shown elsewhere, in all its details.¹⁷ They present the Temple as an assemblage of the implements in the shape of golden silhouettes spread over a uniform background. Although of a highly symbolic and abstract quality, these implements meticulously follow the biblical descriptions as well as Maimonides' explications and comments. They figure in a plan-like arrangement as if to offer instructions towards the erection of a human built future Temple (fig. 9). The strong dependence of the imagery on the details of Maimonides' discussions of the Temple implies that it also mirrors the naturalistic view of the future Temple. In general it appears that the decoration systems of the Sephardic Bibles with their deep roots in Islamic culture reflect, in manifold ways, a Maimonidean world view.¹⁸

Shortly after Maimonides' death in 1204, his rationalist world view became a matter of controversy. Rationalism was considered by conservative scholars as a danger to traditional Jewish values and a threat to the authority of talmudic scholarship. A culture struggle developed, which led to mutual rabbinical bannings by Maimonidean and anti-Maimonidean authorities during the 1230s.¹⁹ During the thirteenth century the apocalyptic approach, which had dominated apocalyptic literature of the late antique

Talmon, Freiburg i.Br. 1983, pp. 154-156; Aviezer Ravitzky: The Messianic Period in the Teachings of Maimonides (in Hebrew), in: *Messianism and Eschatology* 1984 (as in n. 14), pp. 191-220.

¹⁶ Schwartz 1997 (as in n. 14), pp. 93, 98-102.

¹⁷ Katrin Kogman-Appel: *Jewish Book Art Between Islam and Christianity: The Decoration of Hebrew Bibles in Spain*, Leiden 2004, pp. 75-82.

¹⁸ Katrin Kogman-Appel: Hebrew Manuscript Painting in Late Medieval Spain: Signs of a Culture in Transition, in: *The Art Bulletin*, 84 (2), 2002, pp. 247-272.

¹⁹ For details on the Maimonides controversy, see Daniel J. Silver: *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy 1180-1240*, Leiden 1965; Maurice Kriegel: *Les juifs à la fin du Moyen Age dans l'Europe méditerranéenne*, Paris 1979, pp. 145-179; Charles Touati: Les deux conflits autour de Maimonide et des études philosophiques, in: *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*, 12, 1977, pp. 173-184; Bernard Septimus: *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition. The Career and Controversies of Ramah*, Cambridge 1982.

period, was adopted and revived by opponents to Maimonides' scholarship and by the protagonists of the anti-Maimonidean controversy. An early critic of Maimonides was R. Meir Halevi Abulafia.²⁰ This approach envisions messianic salvation of a public, national kind. The messianic era will be introduced by dramatic events leading to a new world in which the law is no longer necessary. In this scenario the Temple will not be rebuilt by human hands, but the heavenly sanctuary will descend to Jerusalem as the Lord's dwelling place but not necessarily for the sake of the restoration of the sacrificial cult.²¹ There were, however, also more moderate dealings with this issue, which Dov Schwartz describes as the "conservative rationalist approach", drawing from both concepts and, even though in principle critical of the rationalist argument, somehow reconciling the two opposites. This path was taken by a group of scholars, mostly from the circle of Nahmanides and active around the middle of the thirteenth century and afterwards. The compromise these scholars sought concerned primarily the status of the law in the messianic era according to the expected scenarios. They tended to follow apocalyptic views, but had difficulty in accepting the assumption that the law will not be observed in the messianic age.²² In short - the Sephardic views can be understood only in relation to the Maimonidean controversy that was shaking Iberian Jewry at that time. The degree to which Franco-German Jews took an active interest in the controversy is an open question still discussed by historians.²³ On the assumption that the Temple image in the *Laud Mahzor* refers to the messianic Temple, I propose to examine to what degree it reflects the reception of the Sephardic views in Ashkenaz and France and how Franco-German Jews coped with the knowledge of these different approaches shortly after the early phase of the Maimonidean controversy during the 1230s.²⁴

²⁰ Septimus 1982 (as in n. 19).

²¹ Schwartz 1997 (as in n. 14), pp. 15-16 and chap. 4.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 93 and chap. 6.

²³ Ephraim E. Urbach: The Role of Ashkenazi and French Scholars in the Controversy Over Maimonides and his Books (in Hebrew), in: *Zion*, 12 (1-2), 1946/47, pp. 149-159; Joseph Dan: Ashkenazi Hasidism and the Maimonidean Controversy, in: *Maimonidean Studies*, 3, 1992/93, pp. 29-47; Ephraim Kanarfogel: Medieval Rabbinic Conceptions of the Messianic Age: The View of the Tosafists, in: *Meah She'arim. Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, ed. by Ezra Fleischer et al., Jerusalem 2001, p. 154, n. 14.

²⁴ I shall elaborate elsewhere on the issue of the reception of the Sephardic views about the messianic Temple in Franco-German Jewish culture elsewhere: Jewish Art and Cultural Exchange: Theoretical Perspectives, in: *Medieval Encounters* (in preparation).

In general Ashkenazic Jews tended to favor the apocalyptic model. A visual expression of this appears in the *Bird's Head Haggadah* produced around 1300 in southern Germany (fig. 10).²⁵ Relying on Christian models, this image shows the apocalyptic city of Jerusalem in the form of a Temple structure descending from heaven.²⁶ This image in no way refers to either the sacrificial cult or the question of the observance of the law.

The representation of the Temple in the *Laud Mahzor* does not belong to any of these clearly defined groups. If my reading reflects to some degree the intentions of the designers or patrons, this composition rather addresses several issues that draw on both approaches. In the following I shall discuss two texts from the Franco-German cultural realm which reflect a similar spirit. Both witness an awareness of the Sephardic controversy; both tend to lean towards the more apocalyptic view; but both are also nourished from the opposite side, the more rationalistic view. They are thus particularly suited to elucidate the background of the *Laud Mahzor* composition.

R. Moses ben Hisdai Taku, an Ashkenazi scholar of the early thirteenth-century, presents a critical assessment of the Maimonidean view in his treatise *Ktav tamim*. On the messianic era he writes as follows: “at the beginning of the redemptive process nothing new will occur except that we will emerge from the bondage of the foreign kingdoms.” This refers to a polemical discussion that developed around the saying of Samuel, one of the most dominant Talmudic sages: “Samuel said: the only difference between this age and the age of the Messiah will be the bondage.”²⁷ Liberation from the bondage of the foreign kingdoms has become a *Leitmotiv* of the rationalist view and R. Moses Taku undertook to confront it here. In his view the emergence from bondage is not the central messianic event, but rather a minor one occurring “at the beginning of the redemptive process.” He continues:

²⁵ For a facsimile edition, see *The Bird's Head Haggada of Bezalel National Art Museum in Jerusalem*, ed. by Moshe Spitzer, Jerusalem 1965.

²⁶ For a discussion of this image, see Sarit Shalev-Eyni: Jerusalem and the Temple in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts: Jewish Thought and Christian Influence, in: *L'interculturalità dell'ebraismo, Atti del Convegno internazionale Bertinoro-Ravenna*, ed. by Mauro Perani, Ravenna 2003, pp. 173-191; another visual reference to the apocalyptic model occurs in the Ashkenazic Bible in Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, ms B. 32 inf., fol. 136r briefly discussed by Joseph Gutmann: When the Kingdom Comes. Messianic Themes in Medieval Jewish Art, in: *Art Journal*, 27, 1967/68, pp. 168-175.

²⁷ *Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 63a; if not otherwise indicated translations from the Hebrew and Aramaic are my own.

But we will then come to know and experience the Holy Spirit, the fire falling on the sacrifices, and the closeness of the Holy Presence in the pillar of fire and the cloud, just as it was during the departure from Egypt. After a time, with the intensification of our redemption and enlightenment [we will see] the resurrection of the dead, and the descent of the Temple which Ezekiel the Prophet apprehended.²⁸

R. Moses Taku deals inventively with the rationalist view, of which he has broad knowledge. He debates and critiques it, and yet he does not fully reject every aspect of it. He adopts various motifs and assigns them a place during the initial phase of the messianic process. For his description of the later phase he tends for the most part towards the apocalyptic model.

R. Moses Taku's French contemporary R. Isaac ben Abraham, known by the abbreviation Ritzba, wrote a treatise about the messianic era which is preserved in only one manuscript, now in Darmstadt.²⁹ Like R. Moses Taku, Ritzba distinguishes between two phases of the messianic process. He sketches a detailed image of the messianic wars; two messianic figures, the Messiah from the House of Joseph who will govern during the wars, and the final messianic figure from the House of David. The Temple will re-appear, the *shekhinah* will return, the *Torah* will be taught, the Last Judgment will take place, and the messianic beasts will be consumed.

Bringing this textual evidence into correlation with the *Laud Mahzor* image leads to a text-image relationship which in the light of art historical practice is somewhat unorthodox. Conventional art-historical methodology discussed texts mostly from the point of view of motival relationship and deals with textual, often narrative motifs and their visualization.³⁰ What we have here is a different kind of text-image relationship, one

²⁸ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, cod. hébr. 711, fol. 40v, facsimile edition by Merkaz Dinur, The Hebrew University (Quntrasim – meqorot umehkarim, 61), Jerusalem 1980, p. 80; for a discussion of R. Moses Taku's view in the context of messianism, see Kanarfogel 2001 (as in n. 23). My English citations are borrowed from Kanarfogel's paper, p. 154, with slight alterations.

²⁹ Darmstadt, Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, cod. Or. 25, fol. 13b-17b. This text was never printed in full, or scientifically published; I am indebted to Israel Yuval for sharing with me a yet unpublished transcript of the text he is currently preparing for publication; for some background on the manuscript, see Israel J. Yuval: Jewish Messianic Expectations towards 1240 and Christian Reactions, in: *Toward the Millenium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. by Peter Schäfer/Mark R. Cohen (Studies in the History of Religions, 77), Leiden 1998, n. 4; for a short discussion of the Ritzba's views, Kanarfogel 2001 (as in n. 23), p. 156.

³⁰ Much has been said about the use of texts in art historical research, and this is not the place to elaborate on this issue; a turning point in methodological considerations was a conference held at the *Index of*

that is based on a conceptual kinship. The texts discussed above do not contain any particular motifs visualized in the *Laud Mahzor* image. However, they share a similar concept of messianism. I do not necessarily imply a direct dependence of the image on the text; rather, this relationship is more plausibly the result of a culture shared by the authors of the texts and the designers of the image.

Both Rabbi Moses Taku and the Ritzba refer to the messianic Temple in terms of Ezekiel's vision. Our image likewise recalls Ezekiel's description of the messianic Temple, the Lord's appearance in it, and the sacrifice to be performed in it, all described in *Ezekiel* 43: "Then he brought me to the gate that faced toward the east. I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east [...] The glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate that faces east. Then a spirit lifted me up and brought me to the inner court; I watched the glory of the Lord filling the temple." The initial *Adon* (the Lord) in the center of the composition certainly recalls the "glory of God" that "came to the Temple by the east gate." The cantor who would use the Mahzor during prayer would face east and the arch in the image would thus face east likewise. In some sense it could function as the east gate of the Temple. The opening of Ezekiel's account is followed by detailed descriptions, first of the altar, and then of the sacrifices to be performed on it: a young bull, male goats, and a ram. The beginning of chapter forty-four, finally, focuses on the presence of God in the shut area of the Temple.

It is not entirely clear to what extent these medieval Jewish scholars envisioned the sacrificial cult as restored during the messianic era. According to the rationalist views there was no doubt about this. The Temple will be built by human effort and the sacrificial rite resumed. According to the apocalyptic model, which envisions a clear break with earthly matters, and a new world rather than restoration, this will not be the case, and in this respect the Ritzba follows the apocalyptic view closely. R. Moses Taku's description, however, mentions the fire falling on the sacrifices, implying the latter's restoration, as shown in our image.³¹

With regard to the question of the law, we can likewise observe two opposite views: a new world in which the law is obsolete versus a restored world in which the law

Christian Art at Princeton University in March 1990, see *Iconography at the Crossroads. Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art*, ed. by Brendan Cassidy, Princeton 1993.

³¹ See n. 28.

has a clearly defined place. Medieval Jewish scholars, however, even if sympathetic to the apocalyptic model, were often concerned about the possibility that there would be no law in the messianic era.³² This concern is rooted in the anxiety that the expectation of any messianic phase in which the law is no longer valid could eventually result in mass-conversions to Christianity.³³

In Ritzba's treatise the observance and the study of the law receive special attention. Among the returned exiles, the sages who know the law obtain special status: "after sages from all four directions and pious men will have settled in Jerusalem and the Messiah will be among them[...];" or: "it is clear that the Land of Israel [will be settled] by men who are knowledgeable in the Torah;" or – towards the end of the treatise: "God will live for ever and we will enjoy his mercy, our hearts will be attached to his Torah, and we will reside in his presence in his Temple, and he will send his Messiah [...] and he will build his city soon in our days, and restore his shrine [...]."³⁴ The Book of the Law will be present on Judgment Day.³⁵ The *Laud* image focuses on the connection between the law, the *Pentateuch*, or by extension the entire *Bible*, on the one hand, and the Temple, on the other. This association is a well-known concept and has frequently been discussed in research. The *Bible* is conceived as a minor Temple so to speak, and there are numerous textual sources that propose links between the two. The link is further emphasized by the obvious identification of Mount Sinai with the Temple Mount.

In light of this shared concept of the messianic Temple the *Laud Mahzor* image most plausibly represents the messianic Temple descending to Jerusalem. But there is still more to this image. The depiction of the sacrifice is set within the arch symbol, a quotation, as we have seen, of late antique Temple imagery. Although the arch symbol is certainly a very abstract one and seems, at first sight, to function as yet another expression of the abstract approach governing most pictorial representations, this

³² Schwartz 1997 (as in n. 14), chap. 6.

³³ In the early modern period the phenomena of false Messiahs, such as Sabbatai Zvi, often led to conversions, as well as Christian expectations that Jews who follow false Messiahs will eventually convert to Christianity; see, Elisheva Carlebach: *The Last Deception: Failed Messiahs and Jewish Conversion in Early Modern German Lands*, in: *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, vol. I: *Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Matt D. Goldish/Richard Henry Popkin, Dordrecht 2001, pp. 130-133.

³⁴ Darmstadt, cod. Or. 25, fol. 13b-17b.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

particular arch is not simply a graphic symbol, but an architectural element with bases, capitals, and two horizontal beams. The color, applied with gradations not typical for the technique normally used in the *Laud Mahzor*, realistically suggests limestone. The detailed architectural element produces some degree of physical reality, which is not shared by other late antique or medieval Jewish representations of the Temple. This, together with the somewhat naturalistic depiction of the sacrifice, set up in a physical space determined by the arch, results in an image into which the contemporary worshipper is drawn, an effect altogether unlike that of the abstract representations of the Temple typical for most late antique and medieval Jewish art. The fact that this image does not represent the symbolic, abstract version of the messianic Temple, but refers to it as a very physical reality, seems not only to imply that the designers wished to convey the Temple imagery in terms of the historical Temple, but that they were living in acute expectation of the approaching messianic era.

The *Laud Mahzor* has no colophon but scholars date it around the middle of the century, to a time span of crucial relevance in the context of messianic expectations. According to the Hebrew calendar the year 1240 was a millennium, namely the year 5000. This was, however, not just any millennium, but the opening year of the sixth millennium. There are numerous variations of how to calculate the date of the expected arrival of the Messiah, but the sixth millennium plays a major role in all these scenarios. According to the Jewish tradition the six days of creation stand for 6000 years of the world's expected existence. The *Talmud* speaks of 2000 years of *tohu* (chaos), 2000 years of law, and 2000 years of messianic era³⁶, leaving open the exact moment of the Messiah's arrival within that time span. A particularly extensive discussion of the six millennia, each foreshadowed by one day of the Hexaemeron, is found in the writings of Nahmanides, mentioned above as a scholar of 'compromise' between the two messianic concepts. None of these sources refer to the year 1240 as the date of the end of the world. But there was a general consciousness of living in a transitional period and of the imminent appearance of signs of the messianic era.

³⁶ *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 97a.*

Israel Yuval³⁷ has shown that the notion of the Hebrew millennium in 1240 implied still further issues. Messianic hopes swept all over Europe among Jews. People prepared themselves for penitence; immigration to the Land of Israel was recommended; Christian anti-Jewish persecution would be avenged. The Mongols were expected to liberate the Jews from the Christian persecutor. Rumors that the Mongols were the ten lost tribes added their share. All these aspects of acute messianic expectation – penitence, defeat of Christianity, revenge of persecution, immigration – were widely discussed among Jewish scholars. The Ritzba took up these issues time and again in his treatise: The Messiah will not come as long as the Land of Israel is in the hands of gentiles and before the exiled return to the land of their forefathers:

And when the community will grow in the Land of Israel and the people will pray on the Mount of Holies[...]. King Messiah will be found among them and he will bring together the exiled who still remain abroad. [...] from all four corners of the world the heroes of Israel will be assembled and he will establish a great army and defeat the rulers of Ishmael and Edom in Jerusalem and he will expel the uncircumcised from the city and not one uncircumcised and unclean person will remain there.³⁸

Let us look for a moment at the aspect of the physical presence of Jews in the Land of Israel. The Ritzba explains, among other things, that the Messiah will come in response to the Jews' prayer at the site of the Temple: "And when the congregation in the Land of Israel increases and they will pray at the holy mountain and their cry for help shall rise up to heaven, the King Messiah will reveal himself [...]."³⁹ More and more Jewish authorities were tending to act towards the realization of this precondition. Nahmanides immigrated to the Land of Israel towards the end of his life,⁴⁰ reached Jerusalem in 1267, and re-established Jewish communal life in the city, which had been interrupted by the Crusaders in 1099. The Nahmanides synagogue in the Old City of Jerusalem still bears witness to this act. Later he settled in Acre, a place that was still a stronghold of Crusader administration. Earlier, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, three-hundred Rabbis,

³⁷ Yuval 1998 (as in n. 29), pp. 105-121.

³⁸ Darmstadt, cod. Or. 25, fol. 13b-17b; see also Yuval 1998 (as in n. 29), p. 107-109

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Although the precise circumstances of Nahmanides' journey and his motives in setting out are unknown, scholars believe that messianic thoughts certainly had to do with his decision, see, for example, Alexandra Cuffel: Call and Response: European Jewish Emigration to Egypt and Palestine in the Middle Ages. in: *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 90 (1-2), 1999, pp. 83-86, 95-98.

mostly from France, had set out on a journey to the Holy Land.⁴¹ Towards the end of the same century Rabbi Meir ben Barukh, the famous Maharam of Rothenburg (d. 1293) had, as Abraham Grossman argues, similar plans that did not materialize.⁴² In short, the physical presence in Jerusalem, the city where the eschatological Temple was expected to descend from Heaven, played a major role in the agitations experienced since the year 1240.

The Crusader period was described by Jewish observers as part of the pre-messianic struggles that would come to an end with the arrival of the Messiah. The same King Messiah was expected to defeat both Edom, as Christianity is referred to in Jewish medieval texts,⁴³ and the Ishmaelites, in a war that Ritzba describes, in Yuval's phrase, as "one monumental final Crusade."⁴⁴ At the same time, Crusaders were, again, on their way to the Holy Land. Encouraged by the papal policy that had pushed the Crusader ideal to the fore again since the 1260s, Louis IX of France set out on his last Crusade. He did not reach Jerusalem, but met his death in Tunis in 1270, in the same year Nahmanides met his in the north of Palestine, perhaps in Crusader Acre.

The Shavuot illustration in the *Laud Mahzor* is unique in stressing the sacrificial cult, thus expressing the expectation that the latter would be restored in the messianic era; it is again unique in linking it to the Giving of the Law; it is also unique in underscoring the aspects of the physical reality of the future Temple of Jerusalem described in the vision of *Ezekiel*. With these particular foci it echoes the messianic concepts of contemporary Franco-German Jewish scholars. But the special stress on the physical space in which a naturalistic sacrifice is performed, very different from the abstract representations of the Temple common in late antique and medieval Jewish art, communicates something of the immediate and acute expectation that embraced Jewish communities throughout Europe

⁴¹ Ephraim Kanarfogel: The *Aliyah* of 'Three Hundred Rabbis' in 1211: Tosafist Attitudes Toward Settling in the Land of Israel, in: *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 76 (3), 1986, pp. 191-215.

⁴² Abraham Grossmann: Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg's Attitude to the Land of Israel (in Hebrew), in: *Kathedra*, 84, 1997, pp. 63-84; Rabbi Meir accompanied by a large community of Jews set out in the direction of Italy, was caught on behalf of Emperor Rudolf I and kept until the end of his life in Ensisheim, Alsace.

⁴³ A great portion of Ritzba's text is devoted to the description of how Edom will be defeated, Darstadt, cod. Or. 25, fol. 13b-17b.

⁴⁴ Yuval 1998 (as in n. 29), p. 108.

at the beginning of the sixth millennium. Not only did the Jews of Europe live in a constant threat of further Crusading activity in their midst, but the idea of a conquest of the Holy Land as such had effected their approaches to a physical presence in the Land of Israel. Having witnessed the threshold of the sixth millennium, they believed to live in the messianic era, in a time that would lead to the ultimate end to come. In the eyes of some of these Jews the physical features of the Temple of Jerusalem and its historical significance had a determining influence on how they envisioned the future messianic Temple to be built at the end of time.