

Hannah's Dragons: Gender and Conversion in a Fourteenth-Century Jewish Woman's Manuscript*

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Scholars devoted to amplifying the voices of Jewish women in the medieval past frequently encounter an ostensible muteness in the sources when confronted with questions of female education, religious practice, and the forging of identity. Acknowledging that the texts produced overwhelmingly by the learned male elite provide only a limited and skewed view of the female world, these scholars have turned their attention to textual, visual, and material artefacts associated with the domains of domesticity, childcare, and everyday religiosity.¹ While exploring these intimate female spaces, they have also focused on how women moved between their own spheres, sometimes shared with their non-Jewish counterparts, and the spheres dominated by men (again, both Jewish and non-Jewish).² Interactions within and across these spaces could cre-

*This is a post-print version of a chapter that was published in: Matthew S. Champion, Kati Ihnat, Eyal Poleg and Milan Žonca (eds.), *Medieval Matters: Europe's Premodern Religious Cultures. Studies in Honour of Miri Rubin*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 252 (Leiden: Brill, 2026), 129–151, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004527621>.

¹The most significant recent contributions include Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebelious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004); Simha Goldin, *Jewish Women in Europe in the Middle Ages: A Quiet Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Elisheva Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz: Men, Women, and Everyday Religious Observance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

²See, for example, Martha Keil, “Public Roles of Jewish Women in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Ashkenaz: Business, Community and Ritual,” in *The Jews of Europe in the*

ate conflicts, but they were also essential in co-weaving the social fabric that in turn upheld and gave form to individual self-perception and self-expression.³

This chapter attempts to explore a facet of these interactions by examining a unique artefact placed at the intersection of male and female domains, one touching upon the questions of female learning as well as religious practice – a manuscript of *Sefer miẓvot katan*, a halakhic compendium by the thirteenth-century French scholar Isaac ben Jacob of Corbeil, copied in 1386 by a Jewish woman, Hannah, the daughter of Menaḥem Zion.⁴

Hebrew manuscripts demonstrably linked to a female scribe are exceedingly rare; only three such examples survive in the Ashkenazic and Italian sphere prior to the sixteenth century.⁵ While the forms and extent of female literacy

Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries): Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Speyer, 20–25 October 2002, ed. Christoph Cluse (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 317–33; Elisheva Baumgarten, “Praying Separately? Gender in Medieval Ashkenazi Synagogues (Thirteenth–Fourteenth Centuries),” *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 44 (2016): 44–62; Rachel Furst, “Marriage Before the Bench: Divorce Law and Litigation Strategies in Thirteenth-Century Ashkenaz,” *Jewish History* 31, no. 1 (2017): 7–30.

³The present discussion is indebted to Miri Rubin’s insistence on the significance of gendered devotion and religious practice in shaping symbolic systems essential for inter- and intra-communal social dynamics, exemplified in her *Corpus Christi, Gentile Tales, Mother of God*, as well as in her more recent examinations of the imagery of Ecclesia and Synagoga. The chapter originated from Miri’s suggestion that my dissertation (Milan Žonca, “Difference and Intellectual Diversity in Late-Medieval Ashkenaz, 1350–1500,” PhD diss., Queen Mary University of London, 2014) would be incomplete without examining how religious authorities approached gendered religious practice. She also encouraged me to look for sources that might reflect how women articulated and manipulated their religious difference within the context of the Jewish community. Miri’s ethos of giving voices to silent (or silenced) actors and making them an integral part of the historical narrative is, I hope, visible in this chapter, and remains a lasting inspiration.

⁴Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, MS 558. For a digitised version of the manuscript, see “Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Ms. Rosenthaliana 558,” accessed January 30, 2025, https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/manuscripts/hebrew-manuscripts/itempage?vid=KTIV&scope=KTIV&docId=PNX_MANUSCRIPTS990001719340205171.

⁵In the late thirteenth century, a woman scribe named Pola (Paula) was active in the Jewish community of Rome – three manuscripts bearing her name in colophon survive. In the second half of the fifteenth century, a woman named Fromet, daughter of the *haver* Rabbi Issachar, copied a digest based on the halakhic code *Mordechai* known as *Ḳizur Mordechai*. See Colette Sirat, “Les femmes juives et l’écriture au Moyen Âge,” *Les nouveaux cahiers* 101 (1991): 20–22; Michael Riegler and Judith R. Baskin, “‘May the Writer Be Strong’: Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts Copied by and for Women,” *NASHIM: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues* 16 (2008): 11–14.

in medieval Jewish communities remain a matter of discussion, it is safe to assume that women capable of reproducing a legal text in Hebrew were few and far between.⁶ We are, however, not only lucky to learn about Hannah's existence and her name from the colophon of the manuscript she copied. Other sources, both Jewish and Christian, provide further information about her life and that of her family. Hannah's father, Menahem Zion, was a member of the group of Ashkenazic immigrants to the Land of Israel after the Black Death.⁷ In Jerusalem, he was exposed to mystical texts of non-Ashkenazic origin, most notably the *Zohar*, a thirteenth-century pseudepigraphic work that became one of the central texts of Kabbalistic literature. Upon his return to Germany, he eventually settled in Cologne, where he established a circle of scholars interested in the study of Kabbalah, which also included Hannah's son or nephew and the later owner of the Amsterdam manuscript, Aaron ben Nathan ha-Levi, also known as Seligman Bing. Like Zion, Seligman Bing bore the title *haver* reserved for scholars who did not hold rabbinic office.⁸ Hannah, therefore, stemmed from a learned family of "secondary", "non-institutionalised" intellectuals, and her ability to produce a copy of a Hebrew manuscript, apparently for her own use, reflected this family background.⁹ p. 131

Hannah's background, however, is also interesting in another respect. Hannah

⁶On the education of Jewish women in the Middle Ages, see Judith R. Baskin, "Some Parallels in the Education of Medieval Jewish and Christian Women," *Jewish History* 5, no. 1 (1991): 41–51; Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious*, 154–73; Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Portrayals of Women with Books: Female (Il)Literacy in Medieval Jewish Culture," in *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture*, ed. Therese Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 525–63.

⁷On Zion, see Israel Peles, "Rabenu Menahem Zion (ha-Zioni)," *Moriah* 11 (1982): 9–20; Elchanan Reiner, "Bein Ashkenaz li-Yrushalayim," *Shalem* 4 (1984): 54–56; Israel Jacob Yuval, *Hakhamim be-doram: ha-manhigut ha-ruhanit shel yehudei Germanyah be-shilhei yemei ha-beinayim* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1988), 282–311; Alfred Haverkamp, "Juden in Deutschland und Italien während des späten Mittelalters. Bewegungen in kabbalistischen Zusammenhängen," in *Frühneuzeitliche Ghettos in Europa im Vergleich*, ed. Fritz Backhaus et al. (Berlin: Trafo-Verlag, 2012), 123–29.

⁸On Bing, see *Hidushim, be'urim u-fesaḳim le-rabenu Seligman mi-Binga*, ed. Mordechai Israel Peles, Benjamin Zeev Neusatz, and Moshe Hanina Niemann (Tel Aviv: Mif'al torat hakhmei Ashkenaz, 1985), 11–13.

⁹On the title *haver*, see Yuval, *Hakhamim be-doram*, 280–81. Ephraim Kanarfogel defines secondary intellectuals as scholars "who were specialists in biblical or *piyyut* interpretation, or in grammatical or mystical studies, but whose involvement or productivity in talmudic and halakhic studies cannot be demonstrated." Ephraim Kanarfogel, *The Intellectual History and Rabbinic Culture of Medieval Ashkenaz* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 21–22.

finished her manuscript several years after being involved in a dangerous and traumatising episode, in which she and her husband Simon were sentenced to death, and Hannah seems to have escaped execution only by accepting baptism. Using this peculiar contextual evidence, I will examine the manuscript Hannah produced, analysing in particular how she chose to structure it through rubrication and how her personal interaction with the text is reflected in marginal illustrations. As a result, I hope to show that the manuscript offers invaluable glimpses into how manuscript copying, an activity dominated by men in medieval Jewish culture, could on occasion also serve as a channel for a medieval Jewish woman to articulate her religious and gendered identity and interact with religious texts in an intimate mode.

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Hannah and the Trial of Simon of Siegburg

Hannah's husband, Simon of Siegburg, settled in Cologne in 1372, one of the first Jews to return to the town after a violent attack on the local community during the Black Death. He numbered among the richer members of the re-established *kehillah*, lending money to peasants, artisans, and merchants, as well as to the nobility.¹⁰

In 1375, Simon and his companion David were accused of being complicit in the kidnapping of Jews under the protection of the Archbishop of Cologne, Friedrich III von Saarwerden (ca. 1348–1414). The archbishop imprisoned Simon and David despite the fact that they were in possession of a letter of protection issued by the city council. The accusation and the subsequent trial seem to have been part of a larger power struggle between the archbishop and the Cologne city council, which eventually escalated into a series of clashes known as the *Schöffenkrieg*.¹¹ The archbishop used the imprisonment of the Jews to both challenge the authority of the city council and solve the financial problems that complicated his relationship with the papal curia in Avignon.¹²

¹⁰On Simon, see Matthias Schmandt, *Judei, cives et incole: Studien zur jüdischen Geschichte Kölns im Mittelalter* (Hannover: Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2002), 256–57; Franz Irzigler, “Juden und Lombarden am Niederrhein im 14. Jahrhundert,” in *Zur Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Alfred Haverkamp (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1981), 128–30.

¹¹Cf. *Die Chroniken der niederrheinischen Städte. Cöln*, 3 vols., ed. Karl Hegel (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1875–1877), 1 (1875): 279–81.

¹²Leonhard Ennen, “Friedrich von Saarwerden,” *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Leipzig:

When, in time, the conflict proved too costly for both sides, an agreement was reached. To demonstrate the restored unity between the archbishop and city, the council decided that the two Jews should be punished by death. Their execution took place on 5 August 1377 and is recorded in several local chronicles, most notably in the so-called *Kölner Jahrbücher* and in the *Koelhoff'sche Chronik*, published in 1499 by Johann Koelhoff the Younger, but based on older sources.¹³

According to all the Christian accounts, the two prisoners were on their way to the gallows accompanied by a third, Simon's wife, Hannah.¹⁴ It is unclear whether Hannah was accused of also taking part in the conspiracy; at the very least she demonstrably assisted Simon in giving loans while he was in prison.¹⁵ While the men were sentenced to be hanged, Hannah was supposed to face live burial – one of the customary methods of execution employed throughout the Middle Ages for women, both Jewish and non-Jewish.¹⁶

But Hannah's execution never took place. One recension of the *Kölner Jahrbücher*, most likely written by an inhabitant of Cologne and perhaps an eyewitness, claims that she actively embraced Christianity in order to save her own life at the very last minute.¹⁷ According to a different version, Hannah was saved through the intercession of the Duke of Cleves, Adolf III of the Marck (ca. 1334–1394), who, as we know from other sources, was indebted

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Duncker & Humblot, 1878), 540.

¹³Hegel, ed., *Die Chroniken der niederrheinischen Städte. Cöln*, II (1876): 27, 74–75, 136; III (1877): 722. The trial is also briefly mentioned in an anonymous Hebrew autobiography, possibly written by one of Simon's relatives. See Israel Jacob Yuval, "Otobiografiyah ashkenazit me-ha-me'ah ha-arba 'e'sreh," *Tarbiz* 55, no. 4 (1986): 541–66 (555–57 for a summary of the events, 565 for the source).

¹⁴On the identification of Simon's wife with Menaḥem Z̄ion's daughter Hannah, see Schmandt, *Judei, cives et incole*, 234–35, n. 358.

¹⁵Irsigler, "Juden und Lombarden am Niederrhein," 129.

¹⁶Esther Cohen, "Symbols of Culpability and the Universal Language of Justice: The Ritual of Public Executions in Late Medieval Europe," *History of European Ideas* 11 (1989), 411–13; Shulamit Shahar, *Women in a Medieval Heretical Sect: Agnes and Huguette the Waldensians* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 112–18.

¹⁷^a[I]n dem selven jaire des vunften dages in dem auste woerden zwene Jueden, mit namen Simon ind David, ind eine Juedinne mit namen Hanna, an dat gerichte in ghen velt gevoert. da woerden die zwene Jueden gehancgen, in die Juedinne solde man da graven. doe si up die kule quam, doe wart sie geleuwich ind geloeft kirsten zo werden. doe wart si weder zo Coelne gevoert ind wart des sevenden dages in dem selven auste zo dem kleine sent Mertin kirsten gedeuft." Hegel, ed., *Die Chroniken der niederrheinischen Städte. Cöln*, 2 (1876), 27. On the author, see *ibid.*, 4.

both to Hannah's husband and to her father.¹⁸ It is indeed likely that the ducal connections of Hannah's family helped in negotiating a pardon under the condition of baptism.

After having narrowly escaped violent and painful death, Hannah's later life raises as many questions as the circumstances in which she had preserved it. Did she remain in her hometown, living as a Christian, at least for a certain period of time? Or did she leave Cologne in order to re-embrace her Jewish identity, perhaps with hopes of return after the situation calmed down and the memories of her baptism faded away? The sample divorce document (*get*) included in the manuscript and dated 1385 in Cologne suggests that she continued to live in her home town, or at least did not move very far away.¹⁹

In contrast, Menaḥem Z̄ion, Hannah's father, eventually left Cologne for northern Italy, where he is attested in 1387 and in the 1390s. The events surrounding his daughter and her husband nevertheless inspired the elegy he composed for *Tisha' be-av* under the title *Z̄ion me'on ḥeshķi*.²⁰ The fact that Simon's execution took place shortly after the holiday commemorating the numerous calamities to have befallen the Jewish people enabled Z̄ion to construct a parallel in the poem between the execution of two innocent victims and the bloodshed in the Jerusalem Temple. Following the imagery of the Hebrew accounts of the 1096 persecutions, the executed Jews of Cologne are represented in Z̄ion's elegy as the Temple priests slaughtered in the sanctuary.²¹ Similarly, the destruction of Jerusalem, which according to rabbinic narrative was caused by "groundless hatred" (*śin'at ḥinam*), is in Z̄ion's elegy mirrored by the death of two members of the community for a groundless accusation.²² Although Z̄ion did not explicitly mention the fate of

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¹⁸See *ibid.*, 74–75; Schmandt, *Judei, cives et incole*, 235.

¹⁹Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, MS 558, fol. 122r. Hannah's son or nephew Seligman Bing also acquired his education in Cologne and the surrounding region. See Peles et al., ed., *Ḥidushim, be'urim u-fesaķim le-rabenu Seligman mi-Binga*, 12; Yuval, *Ḥakhamim be-doram*, 286.

²⁰To the best of my knowledge, no manuscript version of the elegy survived. The oldest printed version I was able to trace is included in *Sefer ķinot* (Lublin: Z̄vi ben Abraham K̄alonymos Jaffe, 1617).

²¹נוצרים | דמי חבלך | שפכו בתוך היכלך | אילו ימי אבלך | מועד לציריך. "Christians have spilled the blood of your rope [Jacob, cf. Dt 32:9] in your Temple. These are the days of your mourning [Z̄ion], the time of your agony." *Seder ķinot*, 13b (at the end).

²²הון כל יקר נמצא תוכך בלי שמצה | קמצא ובר קמצא חרבו דביריך. "All sorts of valuable things [cf. Prov 1:13] are found in your midst [Z̄ion] without blemish, [but] Kamza and Bar Kamza

his daughter in the poem, he did allude to “the suffering that the sons of the mighty ones have caused to the beautiful daughter of the Hebrews”.²³ This brief mention of the fate of his own daughter might indicate Zion’s unease about the way Hannah escaped death.

Hannah’s Markings

When, at some stage, Hannah returned to her ancestral faith, she most likely embarked on a process of reconstructing her damaged reputation in the eyes of her peers and, perhaps even more so, her own. In order to examine how, in the course of this undertaking, she articulated her self-perception and moulded her self-presentation as a Jewish woman, we now turn to the manuscript copy of *Sefer miṣwot ḳaṭan* that she produced about seven years after her conversion. A careful analysis of this artefact can illuminate how Hannah interacted with the text, its structure, and the manuscript as a physical object, and how she used these interactions to re-align herself with the Jewish community. p. 135

Hannah’s manuscript preserves one of the most popular medieval Hebrew texts, a legal compendium *‘Amudei ha-golah* (*The Pillars of Exile*), better known under the title *Sefer miṣwot ḳaṭan* (*The Small Book of Commandments*) or its acronym *SeMaḲ*. Written by Isaac ben Jacob of Corbeil in 1276/77, its structure and contents reflect the growing tendency in the halakhic discourse of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, especially in France and Spain, towards summarisation, codification, and popularisation.²⁴ *SeMaḲ* presents a commented list of commandments divided into seven groups or “pillars”, one for each day of the week, arranged according to body parts and activities associated with them.²⁵ In the introductory epistle, later appended to his book, Isaac of Corbeil presented an ambitious program aimed at disseminating and

[cf. bGiṭ 56a] caused the destruction of the Holy of Holies.” *Seder ḳinot*, 13b (at the end).

²³ על בת יפת עבריים. *Seder ḳinot*, 13b (at the end).

²⁴ Judah D. Galinsky, “On Popular Halakhic Literature and the Jewish Reading Audience in Fourteenth-Century Spain,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98, no. 3 (2008): 305–27; Judah D. Galinsky, “Between ‘Ashkenaz’ (Germany) and ‘Tsarfat’ (France): Two Approaches toward Popularizing Jewish Law,” in *Jews and Christians in Thirteenth-Century France*, ed. Elisheva Baumgarten and Judah D. Galinsky (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 77–92.

²⁵ According to Judah Galinsky, *SeMaḲ* evolved gradually as a “gloss commentary” on a list of commandments that Isaac of Corbeil had compiled and circulated earlier. See Judah D. Galinsky, “The Original Layout of the Semak: A Chapter in the Development of the Glossed Hebrew Book,” *Diné Israel* 37 (2023): 1*–26*.

promoting the study of his work across all levels of Jewish society. He admonished each Jew to recite the allotted section each day and the copies of his work were to be produced using communal funds and made available to readers for one-day loans.²⁶

Indeed, Isaac adjusted the book's structure to facilitate the individual study and memorisation of religious obligations by arranging the *mizwot* according to the body parts and activities associated with them.²⁷ In a manner similar to small-format prayer books, which appeared at the same time and enabled their readers to interact with the liturgical text outside of the liturgy, *SeMaK* exhorted its audience to turn the act of intentionally reciting and memorising basic commandments into a ritual and liturgical experience, a more accessible version of the Torah study that had been the exclusive domain of rabbis and their students.²⁸ This ritualised aspect of the book is expressed most clearly in manuscripts of daily prayer books that have *SeMaK* appended to them.²⁹ Isaac's arrangement of the halakhic material in his work was original and unprecedented, and the success of his project is attested by the fact that the text of *SeMaK* survives in an impressive number of over two hundred manuscripts.³⁰ p. 136

In making his work more accessible to all members of Jewish society, Isaac explicitly included women in his intended audience. As a later gloss at the end of the introduction suggests:

He [Isaac of Corbeil] also wrote further to inform (*lomar*) women

²⁶Isaac of Corbeil, *Sefer Semak mi-Zurich*, ed. Yizhak Ya'akov Har-Shoshanim-Rosenberg, 2nd revised ed., 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 1981–1988), 1:17–18. Recently, Judah Galinsky suggested that this instruction applied only to the list of the commandments, not the extended commentary on these commandments constituting the book itself. Judah Galinsky, “Did Isaac of Corbeil Initiate Communal Copying of His Semak? Revisiting His Letter to the Jewish Communities” (paper presented at the 12th Congress of the European Association for Jewish Studies, Frankfurt am Main, 17 July 2023).

²⁷Ingrid M. Kaufmann, *Visual Aspects of Scribal Culture in Ashkenaz: Shaping the “Small Book of Commandments” (SeMaK)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 41–44.

²⁸For Isaac's understanding of the intentional recitation of a commandment as a significant devotional act, even when the commandment itself is not performed, see Judah D. Galinsky, “Law, Liturgy, and Intent: Isaac of Corbeil's Liturgical Innovation in Thirteenth-Century France,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 114, no. 2 (2024): 235–61.

²⁹Kaufmann, *Visual Aspects of Scribal Culture in Ashkenaz*, 88; Sarit Shalev-Eyni, *Jews among Christians: Hebrew Book Illumination from Lake Constance* (London: Harvey Miller, 2010), 15.

³⁰For a list of manuscripts and manuscript fragments containing the *SeMaK*, see Kaufmann, *Visual Aspects of Scribal Culture in Ashkenaz*, 186–202.

about the positive and the negative commandments that they are accustomed to perform. They will draw benefit from their reading and careful study just like men draw benefit from the study of the Talmud.³¹

While the formulation suggests that women were supposed to be informed orally by men about the commandments pertaining to them, Isaac's book nevertheless opened a window for women who were interested in (and capable of) incorporating the study and recitation of the commandments into their devotional regimen to do so relatively easily. In each of the seven sections of Isaac of Corbeil's *Sefer miẓwot ẓaṭan*, Hannah highlighted the initial words or phrases of certain commandments by writing or decorating them in red ink. This was a common practice that can also be observed in other manuscripts of *Sefer miẓwot ẓaṭan*. However, certain patterns emerging in Hannah's markings and rubrications suggest that these have not been placed at random. Rather, Hannah seems to have used them to relate symbolically to her understanding of female roles within Judaism, and perhaps also to mark the connection between the text of the *Sefer miẓwot ẓaṭan* and her own unfortunate fate.

A large number of highlighted words introduce rules particularly relevant for Jewish women, such as the sections discussing laws of marriage and divorce,³² sections dedicated to dietary laws,³³ as well as commandments associated with the female domain of childbirth and with modesty.³⁴ It seems plausible that Hannah chose to highlight these commandments given their importance for the religious practice of Jewish women. However, Hannah's reading of the *SeMaḲ* through a gendered lens proves more complex. She also highlighted sections discussing the celebration of Passover, particularly the commandments to search for leaven (*li-ṽdoka*) and to purify dishes before the festival (*le-hag'il, le-hatbil*).³⁵ Hannah marked these two sections with decorated initial words (see [Figures 1 and 2](#)), elevating them to the same status as some of the most prominent commandments opening the *SeMaḲ*, such as to acknowledge God's oneness and to love Him, or to honour one's parents.³⁶ Clearly, Hannah regarded

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³¹Isaac of Corbeil, *Sefer Semak mi-Zurich*, 1: 18.

³²Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, MS 558, fols 109r–130r (sec. 179–186).

³³*ibid.*, fol. 107r (sec. 173); fols 154r–174v (sec. 198–209).

³⁴*ibid.*, fol. 41r (sec. 83); fols 103r–v (sec. 155–156).

³⁵*ibid.*, fol. 61v (sec. 97); fols 151r–152v (sec. 196–197). The commandment to search for leaven also appears on fol. 50v, where it is not highlighted.

³⁶*ibid.*, fol. 8r, 31r.

the rituals of preparation for Passover and its correct celebration as something of particular importance to her experience of Jewish religious practice.

The search for leaven and its disposal is one of the central rituals of the Passover festival and as such it has traditionally been performed by the householder.³⁷ While Talmudic law stipulates that women are in principle reliable enough to perform the search themselves, later authorities concluded that, in general, women could not be trusted to perform this ritual duty correctly.³⁸ At the same time, discussions of the practice in medieval halakhic literature and *responsa* suggest that the search for leaven before Passover and its disposal thereafter was a ritual in which all members of the household cooperated in order to prepare their dwelling for the holiday.³⁹ Moreover, it seems that at least some women of high standing and superior expertise were more engaged in the rituals of preparation for Passover than others. Schoendlein, the wife of the Austrian rabbi Israel Isserlein (1390–1460), is known, for example, to have examined her own room before Passover and also wrote a halakhic query about the rules of purification of porcelain dishes before Passover.⁴⁰ Female participation in the search for leaven is also highlighted by a marginal drawing depicting a female figure with a raised broom in her hand, which accompanies the passage dealing with this issue in a thirteenth-century French copy of *Sefer miẓvot katan* (see Figure 3).⁴¹ Other types of female participation in ritual preparations for Passover, such as the baking of *matzot* and the scalding of dishes, are represented visually in an early-fourteenth-century illuminated prayerbook originally from Worms, the so-called *Leipzig Mahzor* (see Figure 4).⁴² While, as Katrin Kogman-Appel noted, these images cannot be read as

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³⁷On the search for leaven more generally see “Bdiḳat ḥamez,” in *Enziklopediyah talmudit*, ed. Shlomo Josef Zevin (Jerusalem: Yad ha-rav Herzog, 1947–), II (1949), cols 344–352; on halakhic discussions of female participation in the search, see Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious*, 189–90.

³⁸Cf. bPes 4a.

³⁹See, for instance, *Sefer Maharil minhagim*, ed. Shlomo Spitzer (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalayim, 1989), Hil. bdiḳat ḥamez, 12.

⁴⁰See Joseph ben Moses, *Sefer Leḳeṭ yosher: kolel minhagim, pisḳe halakhot u-teshuvot shel rabo ha-ga’on ba’al Terumat ha-Deshen*, 2 vols., ed. Jacob Freimann (Berlin: Mekizei nirdamim, 1903–1904), 1:80; Shalom of Neustadt, *Hilkhot u-minhagei Rabenu Shalom mi-Neustadt*, ed. Shlomo J. Spitzer (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalayim, 1977), no. 37.

⁴¹Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS héb. 643, fol. 60r. The manuscript is available online at Gallica website, accessed September 25, 2023, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53014817g>.

⁴²Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, MS Volders 1102/I, fol. 68v, 70v. On the

completely faithful representations of rituals practiced in fourteenth-century Worms, they nevertheless offer access to symbolic meanings of depicted practices and tacitly challenge the claims of those rabbinic authorities who argued that women could not be entrusted with these tasks requiring special attention and effort.⁴³

In addition, it is possible that Hannah highlighted the commandments to purify the dishes by immersion and to search for leaven before Passover because they could also be read as allusions to other important aspects of female religiosity. The Hebrew verb *li-vdok* (“to search for, to examine”), which introduces the commandment to search for leaven, is also used to describe one of the basic religious actions medieval Jewish woman performed each month: the examination of her genital area for signs of menstrual blood during the seven “clean” days after the cessation of her menstrual flow. Similarly, the elaborately decorated initial word *le-hatbil* (to immerse), introducing the commandment to purify by immersion any dishes made by or bought from a Gentile before use, could have reminded the (female) reader of the ritual immersion in the *mikveh* that Jewish women underwent several days after the cessation of menstrual flow.⁴⁴ p. 141

manuscript and its iconographic program, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, *A Mahzor from Worms: Art and Religion in a Medieval Jewish Community* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁴³Kogman-Appel, *A Mahzor from Worms*, 105.

⁴⁴Looking at the decorated word *le-hatbil*, at least one modern female reader assumed that Hannah was highlighting a commandment associated with female ritual purity. See Colette Sirat, “10 June 1386: Hannah Bat Menahem Zion Finished Her Copy of the Sefer Mitzvot Katan,” in *Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana: Treasures of Jewish Booklore*, ed. Adriaan K. Offenberg (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), 6–7. On the role of menstrual impurity laws and female ritual immersion in medieval Jewish culture, see Judith R. Baskin, “Women and Ritual Immersion in Medieval Ashkenaz: The Sexual Politics of Piety,” in *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period*, ed. Lawrence Fine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 131–42; Judith R. Baskin, “Geschlechtsverhältnisse und rituelles Tauchbad im mittelalterlichen Aschkenas,” in *Der Differenz auf der Spur: Frauen und Gender in Aschkenas*, ed. Christiane E. Müller and Andrea Schatz (Berlin: Metropol, 2004), 51–68; Judith R. Baskin, “Male Piety, Female Bodies: Men, Women, and Ritual Immersion in Medieval Ashkenaz,” in *Studies in Mediaeval Halakhah in Honor of Stephen M. Passamanek*, ed. Alyssa Gray and Bernard Jackson (Liverpool: The Jewish Law Association, 2007), 11–30; Evyatar Marienberg, *La Baraita de-Niddah: un texte juif pseudo-talmudique sur les lois religieuses relatives à la menstruation* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012); Sharon Faye Koren, *Forsaken: The Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Waltham, MA; Hanover: Brandeis University Press; University Press of New England, 2011).

The connection between these two areas of religious practice is underlined by recent analyses of the architectural features of German twelfth- and thirteenth-century *mikwa'ot* suggesting that these structures served diverse community functions beyond women's ritual purity and that their layout and decoration reflected the local and temporal variations in immersion practices.⁴⁵ Indeed, at least in certain Ashkenazic communities, it was customary to immerse all dishes – even those previously purified by scalding – before Passover and to perform this immersion in the *mikweh*.⁴⁶ This practice, even though never universally adopted, seems to have been widespread enough to create a symbolic connection between Passover celebrations and female religiosity.⁴⁷

It is also possible that the motifs of separation and purification associated with Passover rituals exemplified Hannah's concern with the demarcation of religious boundaries, reflecting her experience of forced conversion. Throughout the Middle Ages, forced converts were sometimes required to undergo ritual immersion if they decided to return to their former religious community.⁴⁸ Questions of religious identity and communal boundaries were clearly on Hannah's mind when she was copying the *SeMaK*, as attested by the fact that she also consistently highlighted prohibitions against idolatry, as well as positive commandments to destroy places of idolatrous worship and prohibitions of crossbreeding of animals and trees.⁴⁹ The removal of leaven from Jew-

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⁴⁵Neta Bodner and Ariella Lehmann, “‘She-yir’eh ha-adam et ‘azmo aḥarei ha-ṭevilah ke-’ilu nivra’ be-otah ha-sha’ah’: ‘al ṭevilat gevarim, kelim u-khelal ha-zibur ba-mikva’ot be-Germanyah bi-yimei ha-benayim,” *Ḥidushim be-heker toldot yehudei Germanyah u-merkaz Eiropah* 21 (2019): 47–83; Neta Bodner, “Romanesque Beyond Christianity: Jewish Ritual Baths in Germany in the 12th and 13th Centuries,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2021): 369–87.

⁴⁶Bodner and Lehmann, “‘She-yir’eh ha-adam et ‘azmo,” 59–65.

⁴⁷See, for instance, a depiction of women purifying dishes in a *mikweh* in a late-thirteenth-century Castilian Haggadah (London, British Library, MS Or. 2737, fol. 90r). It has been suggested that this particular manuscript was made for a woman as wedding gift. See Julie Ann Harris, “Love in the Land of Goshen: Haggadah, History, and the Making of British Library, MS Oriental 2737,” *Gesta* 52, no. 2 (2013): 161–80. However, Eli’ezer ben Yo’el ha-Levi, a twelfth-century Tosafist, explicitly claimed that immersion of dishes in *mikweh* was not practised in Cologne. Bodner and Lehmann, “‘She-yir’eh ha-adam et ‘azmo,” 63.

⁴⁸On the immersion of converts, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Brothers from Afar: Rabbinic Approaches to Apostates and Apostasy in Medieval Europe* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2020); Paola Tartakoff, “Testing Boundaries: Jewish Conversion and Cultural Fluidity in Medieval Europe, c. 1200–1391,” *Speculum* 90, no. 3 (2015): 757–58.

⁴⁹Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, MS 558, fols 28v–29r (sec. 39–42); fols 103r–107v (sec. 158–177).

ish households and its destruction by fire was in medieval Jewish culture sometimes interpreted polemically and politically, as a symbol of the messianic victory of Israel over Edom. As Israel Yuval has argued, these polemically charged rituals practised during a particularly sensitive festive period seem to have fuelled Christian accusations of Host desecration.⁵⁰ Hannah's highlighting of these rituals might, therefore, not only represent her reflections on female religiosity, but, given their polemical overtones, also constitute an attempt to reclaim her Jewish identity after baptism.

Illustrations

Hannah's use of rubrication suggests a conscious interpretation of the contents of *Sefer miṣwot ʔaṭan* through the lens of her own femininity. However, looking closely at the illustrations that appear on the margins of her manuscript enables us to discern yet another layer of Hannah's interaction with the text, one that created space for her distinct, individual voice. Noting that most preserved manuscripts of *Sefer miṣwot ʔaṭan* were produced for personal use, Ingrid Kaufmann has suggested that "the individualistic circumstances of [the] production [of *SeMaK*]" gave the scribes more freedom than otherwise regarding design issues" and stimulated spontaneous creation, especially in structuring the text and incorporating marginal glosses.⁵¹ p. 143

Hannah employed her creative freedom on the margins of her manuscript, in a liminal domain often inhabited by monstrous and grotesque elements serving to undermine the meanings constructed in the main body of the text.⁵² While not explicitly subversive, Hannah's drawings reveal her intentional interaction with the text, directing the reader's attention to boundaries, transitions, and breaks in the text's structure. Moreover, assuming that the margins are, as Mary Carruthers put it, "where individual memories are most active, most invited to make their marks, whether physically ... or only in their imagination,"⁵³ it is

⁵⁰Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 181–82, 229–36. See also Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999), 93–103.

⁵¹Kaufmann, *Visual Aspects of Scribal Culture in Ashkenaz*, 3–4, see also 69–72.

⁵²See Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992).

⁵³Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd

possible to interpret Hannah's drawings as visual links between the text and its structure on the one hand, and the person reproducing it on the other, links that made possible a "reweaving" of both the text of *Sefer miṣwot katan* and of the invisible text of Hannah's past, written in her memory.

Hannah's manuscript contains four marginal illustrations. The largest of these drawings is an inconspicuous dragon that appears at the very beginning of the manuscript, next to the foliated initial-word *le-da'* ("to know [God]") (see Figure 5).⁵⁴ Another dragon appears at the beginning of the section dedicated to "commandments depending on the mouth".⁵⁵ Spreading its wings above a decorated initial word of the commandment "to sanctify [i.e. set apart] the firstborn [to God]", it is smaller, but more visible than its earlier counterpart (see Figure 6). Hannah also drew two heads of animals resembling dogs. One appears next to a biblical quotation from Isaiah that concludes the section discussing the rules of mourning (see Figure 1).⁵⁶ The other animal head also appears next to a sentence marking a structural divide within the text: this time between biblical commandments "depending on one's hands" and those from the same category that are of rabbinic origin (see Figure 7).⁵⁷ The former group ends with an enigmatic prohibition against bowing down on an engraved stone (*even maškit*), while the latter section begins with a discussion p. 144 of ritual hand washing before meals.

While most preserved manuscripts of *Sefer miṣwot katan* are unadorned or sparsely adorned copies produced for individual study by the readers themselves, Hannah's decision to include dragons and animal heads in her manuscript does not seem to have been entirely out of place.⁵⁸ At least a few manuscripts of *Sefer miṣwot katan* contain decorative elements and illustrations, including those of animals and dragons. For example, a copy written in 1392 in France also contains an initial-word panel inhabited by dragons, hybrids, and a scene of a dog pursuing a doe.⁵⁹ An older manuscript, written probably in 1337 in Leuven, contains an illuminated incipit page with a decorated initial-word panel that is inhabited by two fighting dragons,

ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 314.

⁵⁴Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, MS 558, fol. 7v.

⁵⁵ibid., fol. 66r.

⁵⁶ibid., fol. 61v.

⁵⁷ibid., fol. 107v.

⁵⁸Kaufmann, *Visual Aspects of Scribal Culture in Ashkenaz*, 55–60.

⁵⁹London, British Library, MS Add. 18684, fol. 12r.

two dogs pursuing a deer, a figure with a sword and a shield fighting what seem to be three lions, as well as a (now damaged) image of two jousting knights.⁶⁰ A serpent-like hybrid also appears at the bottom of the first page of a thirteenth-century manuscript of French provenance that contains numerous marginal drawings and jottings, including dragons, hybrids, and other grotesque figures.⁶¹ p. 146

Though admittedly an exception rather than a rule, what are we to make of the peculiar presence of the winged monsters at the beginning of a popular halakhic treatise? The symbolism of dragons in medieval Jewish literature and iconography is complex, combining elements of biblical, rabbinic, scientific, and esoteric traditions.⁶² In rabbinic literature, the biblical imagery of primordial sea monsters created by God at the beginning of creation is developed into a conception of an enormous dragon-like beast that challenges the sovereignty of God and must therefore be restrained.⁶³ In the *Mishnah*, the dragon is explicitly associated with idolatry and pagan worship: vessels with an engraved image of the sun, the moon, or a *draḳon*, must be thrown into the Dead Sea.⁶⁴ In some texts, perhaps under the influence of ancient Near Eastern mythology, this dragon assumes cosmic proportions, becoming the vault of heaven – sometimes identified with the constellation Draco – which controls the astral powers influencing the fate of humankind. A different interpretation is offered by the Sephardic thinker and poet Judah ha-Levi in his *Sefer ha-Kuzari* (4:25): “The [celestial] dragon is a symbol of the world of the intellect, because by this name are known those hidden things which are impossible to perceive with the senses.”⁶⁵ The dragon is often associated or identified with the serpent that tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and thus with deceit and ambiguity. It not only pretends to be God, it can also don human form. A story told in *Sefer ḥasidim* involves *draḳon*, a demon that assumes human form

⁶⁰Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Cod. hebr. 135, fol. 3v.

⁶¹Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS héb. 643, fol. 37v.

⁶²See Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 70–82.

⁶³On the symbolism of primordial sea monsters in rabbinic literature, see also Andreas Lehnardt, “Leviathan und Behemoth: Mythische Urwesen in der mittelalterlichen jüdischen Tradition,” in *Tiere und Fabelwesen im Mittelalter*, ed. Sabine Obermaier (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 105–29.

⁶⁴*Mishnah*, ‘Avodah Zarah 3:3.

⁶⁵Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion*, 88–90.

in order to seduce women and that can only be killed by one of its offspring.⁶⁶

Marc Epstein has argued that in medieval illuminated manuscripts, images of dragons represent elements that threaten Israel and attempt to destroy the Torah. In conjunction with the texts they accompany, their presence underscores God's providential care. Ilia Rodov has demonstrated that the imagery of the dragon was also employed to represent evil forces in synagogue decoration, a practice that on occasion created controversies within the Jewish communities.⁶⁷ p. 147

The concerns symbolised by the dragon in medieval Jewish literature and art – cosmic determinism, divine providence, demonic rebellion, ambiguity of identity, and the role of the intellect – all come together at the beginning of *Sefer miẓwot katan*. Isaac of Corbeil begins his overview of the divine statutes with a discussion of commandments “depending on the heart”. Reflecting Isaac's pietistic leanings, the first twenty-four sections of the book contain rules that focus on personal attitudes to religious practice and express appropriate intentions and emotions in religious life.⁶⁸

The opening section of *Sefer miẓwot katan* reminds the reader of his or her intellectual obligation

⁶⁶*Sefer ḥasidim* (Bologna, 1538), no. 469. Joseph Dan, “Rabbi Judah the Pious and Caesarius of Heisterbach: Common Motifs in Their Stories,” *Studia Hierosolymitana*, 22 (1971): 18–27; Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion*, 80–82; David Rotman, “At the Limits of Reality: The Marvelous in Medieval Ashkenazi Hebrew Folktales,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 20 (2013): 112–17.

⁶⁷Ilia Rodov, “Dragons: A Symbol of Evil in Synagogue Decoration?,” *Ars Judaica* 1 (2005): 63–84; Ephraim Shoham-Steiner, “The Clash over Synagogue Decorations in Medieval Cologne,” *Jewish History* 30, no. 3–4 (2016): 129–64.

⁶⁸Isaac of Corbeil came into contact with texts influenced by the teachings of *ḥasidei Ashkenaz* during his studies at the Tosafist academy of Évreux. To what extent these teachings shaped his own views on prayer, penance, asceticism, and the importance of popular Torah instruction and whether this reflects a broader Pietistic outlook at the Évreux academy remains a matter of debate. See Ephraim Kanarfogel, “German Pietism in Northern France: The Case of R. Isaac of Corbeil,” in *Hazon Nahum: Studies in Jewish Law, Thought, and History Presented to Dr. Norman Lamm*, ed. Yaakov Elman and Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York; Hoboken, NJ: The Michael Sharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press; Ktav, 1997), 207–27; Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Peering Through the Lattices: Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 81–92; Haym Soloveitchik, “Piety, Pietism and German Pietism: ‘Sefer Ḥasidim I’ and the Influence of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 92, no. 3/4 (2002): 476–79 and, most recently, Judah Galinsky, “The Impact of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz in Northern France: The Evidence of Sefer Ḥasidut and Ḥayyei ‘Olam,” *Jewish History* 34, no. 1 (2021): 155–75.

to know that the One who created the heaven and the earth is the only ruler above and below and in the four [cardinal] directions.... [The expression] “to know” is to be interpreted as follows: to exclude those among the philosophers who claim that the world is moving on its own through [the influence of] constellations and there is no mover whatsoever and even the parting of the Red Sea and the exodus from Egypt and all the wonders that happened were [caused] by a constellation. We are obliged to believe that what they say is a lie.⁶⁹

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The presence of dragons in Hannah’s manuscript and other manuscript copies of *Sefer miẓwot katan* seems to highlight the focus of its opening sections on the affirmation of God’s rule over history and cosmos, and His providential care. Framed as an apology for the Jewish belief in creation and divine providence vis-à-vis the caricatured challenge of astral determinism painted as “philosophy”, Isaac’s formulation reflects not only the negative image of philosophy among Ashkenazic rabbis in the late thirteenth century, but also his emphasis on God’s active role in history and providential care for his chosen people as an object of religious knowledge.⁷⁰

Placed in the context of Hannah’s own fate, her images of dragons acquire an additional layer of possible meaning. When interpreted together and in conjunction with the text of *Sefer miẓwot katan*, it is possible to read them as visual reminders of Hannah’s persecution and forced conversion, her subsequent ambiguous position in Jewish society, and her hope in the ultimate redemp-

⁶⁹ לידע שאותו שברא שמים וארץ הוא לבדו מושל למעלה ולמטה ובד' רוחות העולם [...] לידע, פירוש לאפוקי מן הפילוסופים שאומרים שהעולם נוהג במזל מאליה ואין לו מנהיג, ואפילו קריעת ים סוף ויציאת מצרים וכל הנפלאות שנעשו במזל נעשו. ויש לנו להאמין כי שקר הם דוברים. אכן הקב"ה מנהיג את העולם ברוח פיו והוא הוציאנו ממצרים ואין אדם נוקף אצבעו מלמטה אלא אם כן מכריזין עליו מלמעלה. Isaac of Corbeil, *Sefer Semak mi-Zurich*, 1: 49 (no. 1).

⁷⁰ For an example of a critique by thirteenth-century French rabbis of the philosophical interpretation of miracles, see Joseph Shatzmiller, “Les tossafistes et la première controverse maïmonidienne: le témoignage du rabbin Asher ben Gershom,” in *Rashi et la culture juive en France du Nord au moyen âge*, ed. Gilbert Dahan, Gérard Nahon, and Elie Nicolas (Paris: E. Peeters, 1997), 55–82. Another thirteenth-century Tosafist, Moses Ta ḥu, expressed in his writings a negative attitude toward astrological beliefs that he saw as potentially leading to the denial of miracles. See Reimund Leicht, “The Reception of Astrology in Medieval Ashkenazi Culture,” *Aleph* 13, no. 2 (2013): 233. On Ashkenazic attitudes to philosophy and rationalism in general, see David Berger, “Polemic, Exegesis, Philosophy, and Science: On the Tenacity of Ashkenazic Modes of Thought,” *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 8 (2009): 27–39.

tion of her people. The ambiguous serpent, this fire-breathing sea monster that can transform itself and tempt others by its deceptive appearances, may be interpreted as evoking Hannah's own ambiguous identity as a forced convert. It is particularly noteworthy that the smaller dragon appears next to the initial-word *le-ḳadesh*, which echoes the common term used for a martyr's death, "sanctification of the name [of God]" (*kidush ha-Shem*). Thus, while the commandment to sanctify the first-born to God evokes the female domain of child-bearing, the Hebrew word also echoes the ideal of martyrdom, which played an important role in the Jewish constructions of femininity throughout the Middle Ages.⁷¹ Did Hannah find this section significant because it brought to mind the ideal that she internalised, but failed to uphold at the time of the trial? p. 149

Like the images of dragons, the marginal drawings of animal heads may also be read as visual puns on Hannah's persecution and express misgivings about its meaning for her Jewish identity. Placed near a lengthy discussion of rituals connected with death and mourning that may have evoked painful memories of her husband's execution, the image of an open-mouthed head resonates with the biblical verse juxtaposing a reference to past sorrows with a vision of hope in God's final swallowing up of death in the world to come. The next image, located at the end of the section dealing with a particular form of idolatry (*even maškit*), may point to the outcome of Hannah's trial – her conversion. *Even maškit* was generally interpreted as a prohibition to imitate Temple worship, but Isaac of Corbeil also referred to a Talmudic discussion, according to which the prohibition included not only full prostration on a paved floor, but other forms of leaning forward as well.⁷² Could this combination of references to idolatry, a floor paved by stone slabs and ritual prostration have reminded Hannah of her experience of baptism, especially as catechumens were expected to participate in the baptismal rite kneeling on the church floor?⁷³

⁷¹See Goldin, *Jewish Women in Europe in the Middle Ages*, 26–50; Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious*, 198–211; Susan Einbinder, "Jewish Women Martyrs: Changing Models of Representations," *Exemplaria* 12 (2000): 105–27; David Malkiel, "The Underclass in the First Crusade: A Historiographical Trend," *Journal of Medieval History* 28 (2002): 171–83; Rachel Furst, "Captivity, Conversion, and Communal Identity: Sexual Angst and Religious Crisis in Frankfurt, 1241," *Jewish History* 22 (2008): 179–221.

⁷²Isaac of Corbeil, *Sefer Semaḳ mi-Zurich*, 2: 61 (no. 177).

⁷³According to the 1614 edition of *Ritule Romanum*, which reflects earlier medieval practice, the catechumen is supposed to recite the *Pater noster* while kneeling. See the *Ritule Romanum Pauli V. Pont. Max. iussu editum* (Rome, 1623), 45, 52. The early-thirteenth-century

In this context, Hannah may also have found the relationship between this section and the following, dealing with the rules of ritual ablution, particularly meaningful. The hand washing instituted by the rabbis represents an antithesis to her own immersion in water during her baptism, especially as, in medieval Jewish polemical literature as well as halakhic practice, baptism was often associated with ritual pollution that required an act of purification.⁷⁴ By drawing attention to the juxtaposition of idolatrous practice that pollutes and the rabbinic commandment that purifies, Hannah once again seems to have used her marginal markings to articulate her personal interaction with the text of the *SeMaK*. p. 150

Conclusion

Isaac of Corbeil's text belonged to a broader trend in northern France of composing works directed at a popular audience. By structuring the *SeMaK* as a list of the most important commandments in a form accessible to less learned readers, including women, Isaac sought to institute a spiritual regimen, inducing his readers to recite the sections of the text every day of the week. If done with significant internal intention, he claimed, the readers would receive a reward even if that particular commandment was not relevant for them or could not be performed.⁷⁵

We do not know whether Hannah used her copy in the way prescribed by Isaac of Corbeil. At any rate, Isaac's programmatic introduction to *Sefer miẓvot katan* was not included in her manuscript. Nevertheless, the visual elements of her manuscript suggest that she approached the *copying* of this text in a slightly different manner. She *did* read the text mindfully, and she also actively made it relevant to her and expressed this subjective interaction through her markings.

Ordo baptisterii of the diocese of Brixen in South Tyrol stresses kneeling as the main difference between child and adult baptism: "Quibus rite praeparatis, baptizentur eo [= adulto] plane modo, qui supra proximo capitulo de infantibus traditus est; hoc solum excepto, quod ipsimet baptizandi ad singulas sacerdotis interrogationes respondere, nec non sacros exorcismos, baptismum, unctionesque sacras flexis genibus et manibus pie iunctis recipere debeant." Johannes Baur, *Die Spendung der Taufe in der Brixner Diözese in der Zeit vor dem Tridentinum: Eine liturgie-kirchengeschichtliche und volkskundliche Studie* (Innsbruck: Universitäts-Verlag Wagner, 1938), 57.

⁷⁴See, for instance, Susan L. Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 34–35; Tartakoff, "Testing Boundaries," 758.

⁷⁵Isaac of Corbeil, *Sefer Semak mi-Zurich*, 1: 17.

The systematic and regular study of religious obligations provided her with an opportunity for reflection on the meaning of Jewishness and the distinctiveness of female piety. In the course of copying her manuscript, Hannah intentionally selected and highlighted the commandments that were most relevant to her religious life. While she focused on religious practices that were traditionally considered the domain of women, her engagements with ideals of feminine piety did not end there. She also highlighted commandments that emphasised – directly or symbolically – boundaries and resistance to non-Jewish influence. Her rubrication of rituals concerning Passover is particularly interesting here, given the symbolic value of this feast for both Jews and Christians, and therefore its role in highlighting both differences and commonalities between these faiths. Hannah also added illustrations that seem to reflect the ways particular religious obligations spoke to her as a woman and a forced convert. Whether her interaction with *Sefer miẓwot ʔaṭan* was an attempt to expiate her forced conversion to Christianity, or an aspect of a wider shift in female piety, it represents a rare example of a Jewish woman from an educated background using a religious text to reflect on her own gendered difference – both within the Jewish community and in relation to non-Jewish society.⁷⁶ p. 151

⁷⁶This work was supported by the European Regional Development Fund project “Beyond Security: Role of Conflict in Resilience-Building” (reg. no.: CZ.02.01.01/00/22_008/0004595).

Figures

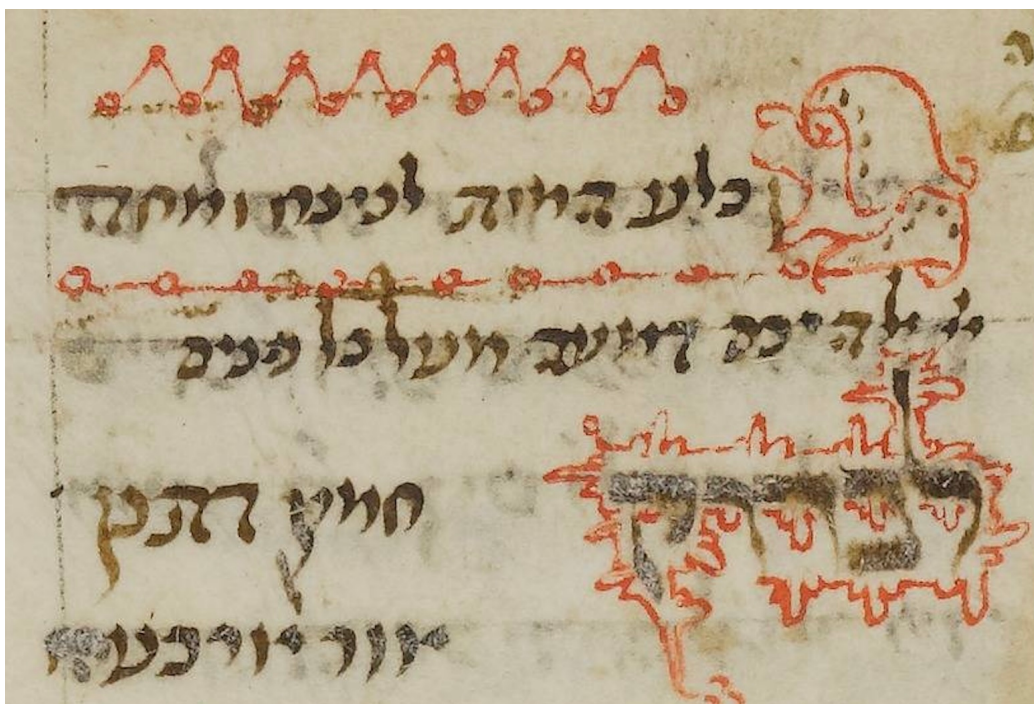


Figure 1: Decorated initial word *li-vdok*. Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, MS 558, fol. 61v. From the collections of Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam. Digitalization by The National Library of Israel, “Ktiv” Project.



Figure 2: Decorated initial word *le-hatbil*. Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, MS 558, fol. 152v. From the collections of Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam. Digitalization by The National Library of Israel, "Ktiv" Project.

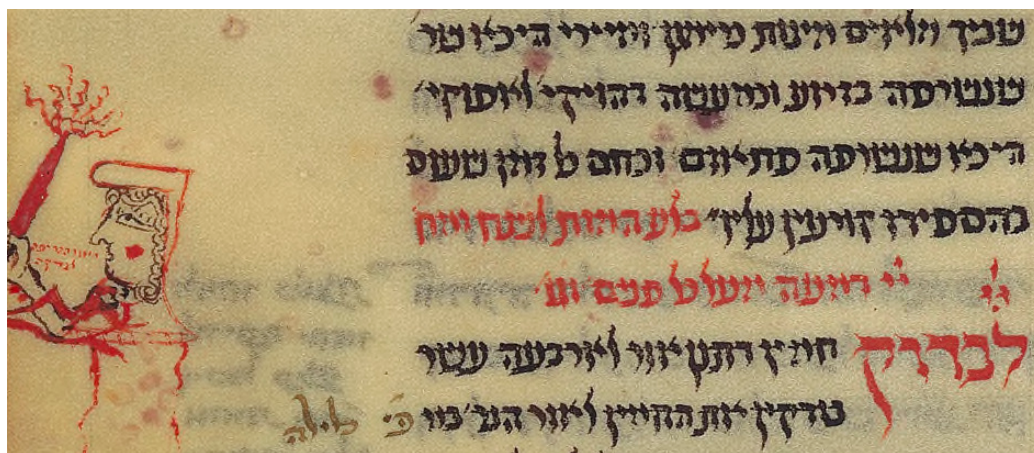


Figure 3: Woman with a raised broom, illustrating the search for leaven before Passover. Paris, BnF, MS heb. 643, fol. 60r. From the collections of Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Figure 4: Jewish women scalding dishes before Passover. Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, Vollers 1102 I, fol. 68v. From the collections of Leipzig University Library. Digitalisation by The National Library of Israel, “Ktiv” Project.



Figure 5: Initial word (*le-da'*) with the larger dragon. Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, MS 558, fol. 7v. From the collections of Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam. Digitalization by The National Library of Israel, "Ktiv" Project.



Figure 6: The smaller dragon and decorated initial word *le-ḳadesh*. Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, MS 558, fol. 66r. From the collections of Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam. Digitalization by The National Library of Israel, “Ktiv” Project.

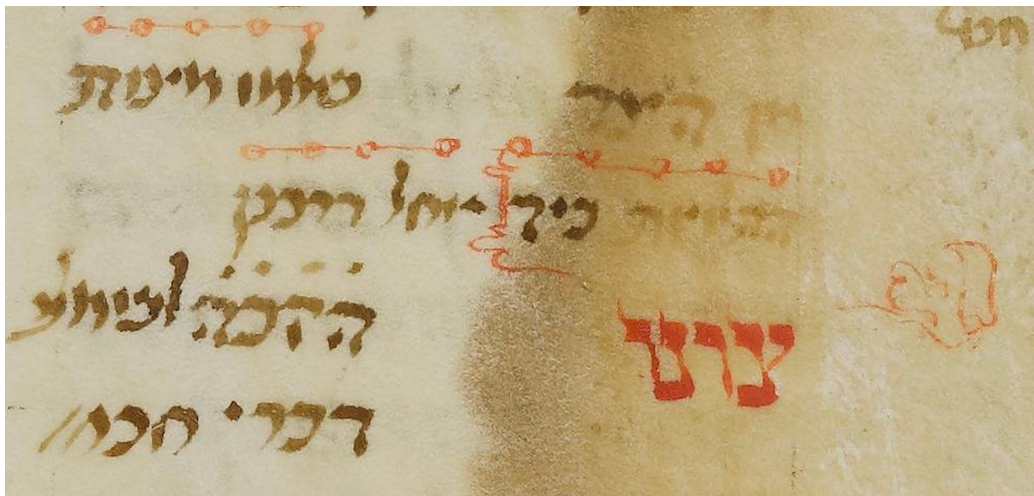


Figure 7: Head of a dog and initial-word *ziwanu*. Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, MS 558, fol. 107v. From the collections of Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam. Digitalization by The National Library of Israel, “Ktiv” Project.