Halakhah and Haggadah – Manuscript Illustrations and their Halakhic and Customary Significance

This post is part of a series of posts regarding illustrations adorning manuscript and print Haggadot. Our first post dealt with a new work on the topic and can be viewed here. In this post we will focus upon the some of the Halachik implications of these illustrations. In many Ashkenazic manuscripts, the Passover illustrations begin chronologically earlier than the Seder. Many begin with the preparation of the matzah. For example, in the Second Nuremberg Haggadah[1], (the manuscript is online here) a 15th century Ashkenazic haggadah, contains ten scenes devoted to the matzah process. A similar haggadah, likely illustrated by the same artist, also includes numerous matzah baking scenes. All of these, however, begin with the bringing of the grain to the miller. This is in contrast to today’s practice whereby the matzah producing process begins earlier, with the cutting of the wheat.
That is, for many today, *matzah shmurah* means *shmura* (watched) from the time of harvest and not from the time of grinding. But, in reality the reason for the illustrations beginning where these *haggadot* do, is simply because they reflect the practice in Ashkenaz, based upon the R. Ya’akov
ben Asher, the author of the *Tur*, that only from the time of grinding is it necessary to “watch” the grain. *Matzah Shmurah* in Ashkenaz in the medieval period meant grain which had been watched from the time of grinding not cutting.[2] Turning to a Sefardic custom, the *Barcelona Haggadah*, produced after 1350, is the earliest record of the custom to place the Seder Plate on someone’s head during the recitation of *Ha Lahma Ania* (Ashkenazim remove the plate from the table).
Only some three hundred years later is this custom mentioned in printed sources. Additionally, there is a difference between the Sefardic and Ashkenazic *haggadot* regarding what the Seder Plate actually was, with the Ashkenaz depicting a plate, whereas the Sefardic manuscripts depict a basket.[3] When it comes to *marror* and what vegetable that is, we have at
least two different types depicted in various manuscripts. In the *Brother to the Rylands Haggadah*, *marror* is depicted as an artichoke, as is in the case with the *Sarajevo Haggadah*. 
While in many manuscripts, *marror* is a leafy vegetable.\[4\]

Setting aside the issue of what *marror* is, another custom related to *marror* can be found in both printed and manuscript *haggadot*. In the Prague, 1526, the first illustrated printed *haggadah*, there is a picture of a man pointing at his wife
with the legend, “there is a custom that a man points to his wife when mentioning marror based upon the verse Ecclesiastes 7:26 “Now I find woman more bitter than death.”

A.Y.

Hyman the scholar of Jewish liturgy was appalled when he came across this. In his autobiography, he claims that there is no
basis whatsoever for this “custom.” Hyman is wrong. If you look at the *Brother to the Rylands Haggadah* you can see that it shows this custom. As does the *Washington Haggadah*. Likewise, the *Rothschild Miscellany* shows the same custom.
It’s worth noting that the Rothschild Miscellany shows another custom at the time, mid-14th century, that of mixed dancing.
The mixed dancing is that of couples, husband and wives dancing with each other, and not that of unmarried men and women dancing. In Italy, where this manuscript was composed, mixed dancing was apparently common during this period. Returning to the gesturing at one’s wife at marror, in the Hiluq and Biliq Haggadah this custom takes on a somewhat more humorous dialogue with the wife no longer passive but instead returns the compliment. In that haggadah it includes speech balloons and they record the following: The husband states “touching marror I must recall that this one, too is bitter [as gall].” To which the wife replies, “It is you [my husband] is one of the causes of bitterness as well.” After which, we have a play on the 13 attributes of Rabbi Yishmael and the haggadah provides that “the third comes between them [perhaps the marror itself] and makes a stink” – or in Hebrew ve-yavo ha-shlishei ve-yakhriach benehem.
Similarly, in some Ashkenazic haggadot manuscripts, they show the husband and wife pointing at one another. Finally, we get to a halachik error in a manuscript haggadah. The Washington Haggadah was written by a scribe named Joel ben Simon. This haggadah was first printed as part of the Diskin Orphan House haggadah series in 1965. The Library of Congress didn’t publish its facsimile edition until 1991, and last year
another facsimile edition of this *haggadah* was published as well. Although this *haggadah* was written close to 300 years prior to Diskin publishing it, until that time a significant scribal error escaped notice. Specifically, in the text for *eruv tavshilin* rather than just saying “with this eruv I am allowed to cook from Yom Yov for Shabbat,” it continues and says “and on Shabbat for Yom Tov.”
הרמב"ם: מעשה עוזי

הרמוה

салמה שלמה סדנאה

פָּדָה לְאַבָּדָה, הָעַדָּה, עֵדוּתָה

בְּרִיתָת סְרֵי לַעֲרֵי גְּדוֹלָה

לֹא בְּרִיתָה מִבָּהֶם בַּלּוָהָה בִּעַד הָעַדָּה

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בְּרִיתָה סְרֵי לַעֲרֵי גְּדוֹלָה
Needless to say this did not escape the eagle eyes of some who feared that someone may use this haggadah (we note that contrary to the other reproductions mentioned, the Diskin version is a poor copy) and inadvertently think it is permissible to cook on Shabbat. So, the ever wise Agudat ha-Rabbonim took out ads in the Yiddish daily, Der Tag, and the Forward to let its readers know of this error. The publishers took this one step further and mailed out a letter, with the provocative title, “Heresy or Blunder,” after Passover indicating the error and also included a letter from Cecil Roth, who had written about manuscript haggadot.
HERESY OR BLUNDER

by B. D. Drenger

See also letter by Dr. Cecil Roth on page 3.
In his letter he indicates that indeed this was most likely inadvertent and that Joel did not have a different tradition regarding eruv tavshilin. Indeed, we know from Joel’s other manuscripts, where he records the correct blessing, that the Washington Haggadah’s version was simply a scribal error.
There is an old saying, "You don't buy a Haggadah after Passover, you don't discover a Haggadah after Passover." However, something very unusual was brought to light about our recently published Washington Haggadah, which makes it even more interesting and timely before Passover.

The manuscript of this Haggadah was copied about 500 years ago. We know very little about this Haggadah, its fate and wanderings for centuries, who its owners were until 1912 when it reached the attention of the Library of Congress.

We proudly published this Haggadah. It was a resurrection, after nearly five long centuries. The publishing brought to light an interesting error in it. The benediction for the Pesah kiddush, which usually begins with the words "From palace to the Sabbath, K'di l'Sabbath" continues in this Haggadah with the words "From the Sabbath to the holiday, K'di l'K'di l'Sabbath." This, of course defeats the purpose of the 'Eruv ha'Shloah. According to Halachah, we are not allowed to prepare food on the Sabbath for the next day.

This added clause caused quite a stir among the Orthodox. A Rabbinical organization placed an add in some Jewish papers warning the readers to be careful in using this Haggadah.

At first, we were very much disturbed about it. On second thought, however, we realized that our unique Haggadah has the distinction of possessing such an amazing error detected after 500 years. It far exceeds value stamps bearing miscalculations. Besides its historic value, this Haggadah has now the added value of a rare oddity.

The Washington Haggadah also has some other very interesting features. The 2nd 1/4 p. "Pour out thy wrath," consists in most of the Haggadahs of four sentences. Our Haggadah has only one sentence, the first one. This is the Italian custom. The Spanish have two sentences, the Ashkenazim have four, and some other Jewish communities even more. There are about 20 different verses which have been used for this purpose.

One of the owners of this Haggadah was not satisfied with one sentence, and added his own handwriting, "worse to us."

The next oddity: I am speaking about a unique Haggadah in its kind. The simpleton of the Four Sons depicted with a book. I doubt that there had been comics at that time and the book was always the symbol of knowledge. I spoke with authorities on such matters, and they could not give me any explanation. This also is not according to our tradition. Rabbi in his commentary, the simpleton says, "mainly a blind child." But even more outspoken is the Talmud Jerusalem, "saying, 'This is the fool, what does he say?'" It seems this is really the only Haggadah with such a picture and therefore this Haggadah will be considered unique for this additional reason.

I feel sure that the future no Rabbi grater speaking about Haggadot will fail to single out our Haggadah. Furthermore, it will be mentioned in future editions of reference books and anthologies.

P.S. — Please attach communication to your copy of the Washington Haggadah for future reference.
This is not the only error related to halakha and haggadah illustrations. R. S.H. Kook, criticizes two aspects of illustrations that appear in the Prague 1526 Haggadah. Both of
these issues center around how the wine glass is depicted. Specifically, he takes issue with the fact that in many of the illustrations show the wine glass in the left hand and not the right. Additionally, he complains that the illustration show the holder grasping the glass at the stem and not at with his fingers cupping the bottom of the glass.
Regarding the first issue, that of left handedness, this anomaly may be attributed to the fact that this was the first completely illustrated woodcut haggadah. And, as it was the first, it was not necessarily perfectly executed. But, before we continue we must digress and explain about woodcuts in order to get to the left handedness. A woodcut when inked and put on paper produces a mirror image of whatever the woodcut depicts. Thus, if the woodcut was of a right hand, when pressed on paper would produce a left handed image. Additionally, when copies were made, the copyist were not careful and would reverse the images. That is, they were working off the printed image and would copy it directly rather than accounting for reversing the image to ensure that when it was used it would produce the same and not a mirror image. So, as has been explained, during the early history of woodcuts “copies [of woodcuts] were constantly being made, with or without leave, for copyright hardly existed, and the same printer would often have to replace worn cuts by new blocks in successive editions. It is not always an easy task to distinguish copy from original. Immediately recognizable as from different blocks are subjects which appear in reverse directions, for the copyist who does not take the trouble to reverse his drawing from the original print, will make a block that will print the subject reversed.”[11] We can now explain why the images are left handed, presumably, they were copied and the woodcutter was not careful to reverse the image, thus producing a left handed image. As an aside, another example of copying which reverses the images may be seen when the Prague 1526 Haggadah was itself used as a model for a woodcut. The border surrounding Shefokh was reused in the Levush. As is apparent, the images are that appear on the right in the Prague 1526 Haggadah appear on the left in the Levush. And, those on the left appear on the right.
Regarding the second point, the failure to cup the glass rather than grasp the stem, this can be attributed to an error on R. Kook’s part and not the woodcutter. While today it may be commonplace to cup the glass, this was only popularized by R. Yeshaya Horowitz, in his book, *Shnei Luchot ha-Brit*, (Shelah).
R. Horowitz wasn’t born when the Prague 1526 *Haggadah* was printed – he lived between 1565-1630. Moreover, his book was published posthumously, in 1648, more than 120 after the Prague 1526 *Haggadah* was published. Thus, it is unremarkable that the *Prague 1526 Haggadah* failed to account for a custom that didn’t exist at that time. This is another example of why bibliography is important, for other examples see here.

Finally, we conclude this part of the series regarding halachot and Passover in general, and specifically, the notion that on Passover we are stricter than normal. At times it appears that some go overboard with the various *humrot* on Passover as well as cleaning all sorts of items that seemingly don’t require cleaning. But, from the evidence of manuscript illustrations, this notion of stringency is not a new one. The Golden Haggadah, circa 1320, includes this very nice image of cleaning and searching for leaven. If one looks closely they will note that the woman on the left is apparently sweeping the ceiling! Thus, indicating that perhaps going overboard has been the case for some while. Also of note is that the father is performing bedikat hametz and he is bareheaded (as is the son). [12]
Its title is a reference to the fact that from the mid-nineteenth century until 1957 it was housed in Nuremberg, after which it moved to the Schocken Library, and then to a private collector. The reason it is the the Second, is because Nuremberg also had another manuscript haggadah — now known as the First Nuremberg Haggadah. It too is no longer in Nuremberg. Today it is in the Israel Museum.