

Romulus and Moses: Expressing Social Conformity through Images of the Past in the Amsterdam Haggadot of 1695 and 1712

David Frankel

Abstract

As in many other times and places Jews of seventeenth century Amsterdam developed an acceptance of and conformity to the social and cultural context of the host society. Aspects of this accommodation are explored in relation to an analysis of the illustrations in the Amsterdam Passover *Haggadah*, published in 1695 and 1712, scenes which were destined to become the archetypes for subsequent printed and hand-made versions for the next three centuries. The images themselves were based on historical and biblical illustrations by Matthais Merian the Elder. Here their selection, modification and transformation from a secular or Christian into a Jewish context takes as a starting point the re-imagining of a picture of Romulus and Remus as Moses and the Egyptian overseer.

Introduction

Jewish society has never been static. Internal developments of custom and behaviour were as often as not influenced by external forces and the prevailing attitudes, both negative and positive, of the peoples amongst whom they dwelt. Sometimes this involved unconscious changes as a local Jewish habitus developed within a broader cultural, economic and technological context; but they also often involved a more deliberate emulation which provided a protective veneer to reduce the perception of difference. Alongside intangibles, such as in language and foodways (for example, Cohen 2011) conformity to broader social norms can be traced through the lens of material culture, seen in both the form and style of artefacts, in depictions (Metzger and Metzger 1982) and in inventories (Levie Bernfeld 2012). Indeed, it is this blending to the point of invisibility which prompted antisemitic demands for distinguishing markers for Jews, whether through badges, clothing or adornment, such as women's ear-rings that were so symbolically important in Renaissance Italy (Hughes 1986).

Books and manuscripts, especially illustrated books from both before and after the advent of printing, provide one major resource for exploring this complex process of acculturation, of evolving conformity, with innovations set against an inherent conservatism as Jews adapted to changing circumstances (Schrijver 2007, 2017; Mann 2015; Sabar 1984).

Here I will consider some of these issues following an examination of the illustrations in the influential *Haggadah* published in Amsterdam in 1695 and

its second edition of 1712 — a more private and domestic manifestation of identity construction than public displays such as the impressive Portuguese Esnoga Synagogue completed in 1675, which provided both Amsterdam residents and travellers with an insight into Jewish life and customs then as it does today.¹

Of all Jewish books the one most favoured for illustration has always been the Passover *Haggadah* used in a domestic context at the ceremonial meals (*Seder*) on the first nights of Passover. The *Haggadah* provides the basic script for the performance of this annual commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt. It does not, however, follow a straightforward narrative sequence. The content and structure of the *Haggadah* was established in the first millennium CE, and consists of elements of various kinds taken from, or referencing, primary Biblical, later Talmudic and related sources, together with additional commentaries as well as liturgy. Like many of the associated rituals and customs of the *Seder*, the *Haggadah* and accompanying commentaries serve to entertain and instruct participants of all ages and status, especially children — all engaged in a lively, active participation in a family event. Illustrations enhance this involvement, while offering, at times, a form of additional commentary and expansion of the text, alluding to related stories or interpretations. The common inclusion of self-referencing pictures of the *Seder* and specific elements within it are a reminder that the whole night involves both a personal identification with, and an individual ownership of, a shared history and tradition (Sacks 2007, 1-2). Serious at its core, neither the *Seder* nor the *Haggadah* are seen as solemn, but both allow room for — indeed encourage — amusement alongside instruction (Ochs 2020).

Few Medieval manuscript *Haggadot* survive, but those that do show well established traditions of illustration, often reflecting both styles and attitudes towards iconography of the surrounding communities (Narkiss 1969, 15) and different embedded emphases and interpretive exegesis where Jewish works avoided or transformed Christian imagery to fit their different understanding of biblical texts (Kogman-Appel 2006, 8, 165). In a Spanish (Sephardi) tradition the text was often preceded by a series of illustrations of selected events in Genesis and, especially, Exodus. The text, while embellished, often had no figurative illustrations. In the main European (Ashkenazi) tradition there were no introductory narrative cycles, but pictures were included within the text. These were not confined to Biblical scenes but included other elements in the *Haggadah* or referred to events not directly mentioned. There are images of the *Seder* itself, associated customs, “portraits” of Rabbis quoted in the text and depictions of other characters and scenes. The choice of subject, placement in the text and iconography employed can be analysed to show intention and a self-conscious commentary and elaboration of the text (Epstein 2011, 7-14).

Although initially more limited in number and complexity, a similar mix of images is seen in the woodcuts which illustrated early printed *Haggadot* in Europe. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries more illustrations were added, including a wider range of Biblical events, sometimes including additional detail or depictions of traditional elaborations of stories alongside the simple accounts as well as genre scenes of the *Seder* service, preparation for Passover and the like. Common themes became standard or expected, reinforcing familiarity and identity (compare Epstein 2011, 3). As with earlier illuminated manuscripts innovation was suspect rather than promoted (Kogman-Appel 2006, 49).

These early printed *Haggadot* copied both typography and illustrations from one another. It was not uncommon for the same woodcut to be reused in different editions or even to appear more than once within the same volume where they could be used to illustrate different characters. For example, the same image might be on one occasion a representation of ‘a wise and learned man’ and elsewhere be identified as the Pharaoh of Egypt (Yerushalmi 1975, 36). Similar borrowings and transformations drew imagery into the Jewish context from outside sources: a classic case is the use of Michelangelo’s Jeremiah in the Sistine Chapel as the model for the ‘Wise Son’ in the Mantua *Haggadah* of 1560; an image which was later recycled, and variously identified in later editions (Yerushalmi 1975, 23). There was therefore a well-established practice of appropriation and transformation in these early printed *Haggadot*, many of which were part of a broad and evolving printing tradition. The Venice *Haggadah* of 1609, often reprinted, was one particularly important and popular version, including numerous high quality woodcuts of genre scenes and Biblical history, alongside a specially edited version of a commentary on the text by Isaac Abarbanel (Yerushalmi 1975, 44-55; Habermann 1971, 172).

The *Haggadah* published in Amsterdam in 1695 set a new standard. Although primarily including familiar and expected scenes the images were radically different from earlier illustrations, not only because they were finer quality copperplate engravings rather than woodcuts, but also because they used a different suite of images of the past. While some, such as the figures of Moses and Aaron on the title page had clear antecedents in Jewish publications (probably copied from the 1678 Yiddish Bible illustrated in Aptroot 1996), most were copied by the engraver Abraham ben Jacob directly or indirectly from the work of the prolific Swiss engraver Matthaus Merian the Elder (Wüthrich 2007). Since Rachel Wischnitzer’s (1931) first identification of it, the source has commonly been referred to as Merian’s *Icones Biblicae* (1625-27) but many illustrations were in fact copied from some of the 329 copper engravings Merian prepared for Gottfried’s massive, and often republished, *Historische Chronik* (1619; Wüthrich 1993, 62-112). Unlike the scenes taken from the *Historische Chronik*, which are reversed (as is common where engravers directly copy originals), those using material in

Icones Biblicae are not. This suggests that Abraham ben Jacob used an intermediate source — probably one of the many pirated versions of Merian's picture bibles or sets of illustrations repeatedly published in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century (van der Coelen 1996, 44-48, 59, 159; Wüthrich 1993, 21-25). Here reference will be made to Merian's originals, rather than these putative unidentified intermediate sources, although the point is a significant one, as it indicates the material available to Abraham ben Joseph for copying — a widespread set of imagery common among the general population, and one which he used in other contexts, such as an amulet printed in 1700 (Sabar 2019).

Abraham ben Jacob was a convert to Judaism. The listings by Wolf (1727, 39; 1733, 763) identify him as originally a Christian clergyman from the Rhineland (Figure 1) (for recent discussions see Stern 2010-2011 and Sabar 2019).² Abraham ben Jacob and the publishers of the 1695 *Haggadah* were, however, not the first Jews to make use of Merian's work: it was clearly regarded as an appropriate source both by individual scribes such as Abraham de Chaves who copied the one drawing in the *Megillat Esther* (Scroll of Esther) he wrote in the Netherlands in 1687 from the picture of Esther kneeling before Ahasuerus in the *Icones Biblicae* (Israel Museum L 80.5 0202; see also Wischnitzer 1965), and by publishers, notably those responsible for commissioning the simplified woodcuts included in the 1692 Sulzbach edition of the *Tsene-U'rene* (a long-lasting popular Yiddish paraphrase of Biblical and related material) (Wischnitzer 1965; Heyd 1984).

The two editions of the highly successful Amsterdam *Haggadah*, however, provided archetypal images for generations of subsequent *Haggadot*. The text, typeface and the images were all copied and recopied in printed editions in all parts of the Jewish world (Yerushalmi 1975; Sabar 2008; Cohen 1998, 90-91, 94) and they still appear in cheap editions today. The Amsterdam *Haggadah* engravings were also the basis for the hand-painted illustrations in manuscript versions popular in western Europe in the eighteenth century (Peled-Carmeli 1983; Schrijver 2015) and also appeared on a variety of ceremonial objects.

The dominance of the Amsterdam editions reduced the variability and idiosyncrasy of *Haggadah* illustrations, limiting rather than expanding artistic expression and catering to a comfortable conservatism. A reaction to this and a desire for more personal and individual copies may have been a factor in the eighteenth-century fashion for personal manuscript *Haggadot* which although closely based on the Amsterdam model provided lively and colourful alternatives to that more sober original printed version.³

Romulus and Moses

The Amsterdam *Haggadah* of 1695 included a dramatic image of Moses striking and killing the Egyptian overseer — a pivotal event in Exodus, although not of course retold in the *Haggadah*, where Moses is not mentioned

(Figure 2). In the centre, Moses, his head swathed in a hood or chaperon, faces left, bending over the sprawled Egyptian, his staff in his left hand stretched out behind.⁴ The action is set in a building scene, with construction work on walls, towers and arches in the background. Workmen chisel stone blocks or mix clay and carry bricks in the middle ground to either side. Two camels place the scene in Egypt. Following a common approach there are two related scenes included in the one frame, each identified by a separate caption taken from the relevant Biblical verse. In this case the caption on the right refers to the scene generally: ‘And they built Pithom and Raamses’ (Exodus 1.11). The one on the left refers more specifically to Moses’ actions: ‘And he turned this way and that and struck down the Egyptian’ (Exodus 2.12).

Although this scene most often continued to be identified as the killing of the Egyptian, in some later *Haggadot* the caption leaves this interpretation open, allowing it to be seen as a representing the general oppression of the Children of Israel in Egypt — for example in the first printed English *Haggadah* (1770) there is only a single caption, with the one more complete sentence: ‘And they built garrison cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses’ (Exodus 1:11), with no reference to Moses. Some of the current *Haggadot* which still use these pictures make this reading even clearer, with the scene captioned more explicitly: ‘And the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigour’ (Exodus 1:13). In these cases ‘Moses’ has become an Egyptian taskmaster and the taskmaster he killed an abused slave.

The overall setting and the central action was taken from Merian’s depiction of Romulus killing Remus while building the walls of Rome (*Historische Chronik*, Figure 45) with some other appropriate changes (Figure 3). The small figure of Remus mockingly vaulting over the ditch demarking the line of the unfinished walls of Rome — the action precipitating Romulus’ violence — was erased, as were items such as Remus’ sword and shield, while Romulus’ helmet was replaced by less military headgear, similar to those used by Abraham ben Jacob in other scenes. In creating this scene Abraham ben Jacob copied directly from three of Merian’s illustrations in the *Historische Chronik*. Minor elements were abstracted from a scene of the Tower of Babel: the two camels and the four workmen on the left mixing clay (*Historische Chronik*, Figure 16) (Figure 4) and the kiln and associated building from a general scene of construction in Egypt (*Historische Chronik* Figure 23).

Merian transformed

This transformation of so different a scene and context raises a number of questions: can one read through this particular example to expose some underlying attitudes and approaches? Setting aside the issue of Abraham ben Jacob’s background as a convert — especially as his work must have gone through an approval process by his employers — one straightforward view is that there is no particular issue involved and that Merian was simply used as

a pattern-book. With no good-quality Jewish originals to imitate, the engraver (or quite possibly a committee including the editors and publishers of the *Haggadah*) deemed particular images appropriate, in this case finding a convenient model of violence in a building context which could be modified and supplemented to suit.

This is, naturally, the course followed with those scenes for which there was an existing original, which were selected because they fell within the general repertoire of familiar *Haggadah* images. This is the case, for example, with the scene showing Pharaoh's daughter finding Moses in the Nile (*Historische Chronik*, Figure 22) and the Egyptian's drowning in the Red Sea (*Historische Chronik*, Figure 24).⁵ In both these cases Merian's alternative versions in *Icones Biblicae* were ignored in favour of those in the *Historische Chronik*. For the scene at the Nile this may have been because the *Historische Chronik* version was more complex, with additional figures that could serve to illustrate the general context, referred to in one caption 'And Pharaoh charged that every boy that is born you shall throw into the river' (a contraction of Exodus 1:22) as well as the more specific scene 'And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river' (Exodus 2:5). There was little need to alter Merian's 'Plague of Frogs' (*Icones Biblicae*, I: XXXVIII) or 'Moses and Aaron confronting Pharaoh' (*Icones Biblicae*, I: XXXVII), although in the latter case, and elsewhere, specifically Christian iconography (such as the horned Moses and Aaron anachronistically wearing a priestly crown) was appropriately modified.

The *Haggadah* picture of the three men (angels) visiting Abraham and Sarah at Mamre (Genesis 18:1-15) was taken from the *Historische Chronik* (Figure 19) in preference to the very different depiction in *Icones Biblicae* (I: XIV) which saw the visitors in human form, without wings, something which would perhaps have been more in keeping with Jewish commentaries explaining the behaviour of these supernatural beings and used in the first Sulzbach edition of the *Tsene-U'rene* (Heyd, 67, Figure 4). The overall layout of the scene was altered, removing the secondary depiction of the Binding of Isaac from the background and replacing the mountains on which it was set with a riverscape to illustrate a key reference in the *Haggadah* to Joshua (12:2-4): 'But I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates.' It forms part of a narrative sequence telling the story of Abraham, following on from an earlier episode discussed below (see also Figure 7).

Other scenes were transformed more substantially and given a new meaning. Merian's engraving of Joseph entertaining his brothers in Egypt (*Icones Biblicae*, I: XXXIII) was used as the basis for illustrating the section of the *Haggadah* which describes a night-long debate on the meaning and significance of the Exodus by five Talmudic sages at Bnei Brak. Here an outdoor setting in Egypt was modified to be indoors, with the candles in the chandelier alight to show it was night-time and with other appropriate alterations (for example, adding hats to the seated men in accordance with

Jewish custom). In the 1712 edition of the Amsterdam *Haggadah* the picture was altered further to develop an additional, important element of the story — the arrival of students to remind the sages that it was time for morning prayers.

It can also be argued that the choice of some other source images was neither incidental nor accidental (Frankel 2010). One section of the *Haggadah* identifies four archetypal sons and explains how one should relate to them and explain Passover and its laws and customs. These “Four Sons” were always a favourite subject for illustration, often with added meanings on the nature of their characters: wise, wicked, simple and “unable to ask”. Abraham ben Jacob abstracted his Four Sons from three different scenes in the *Historische Chronik* and one from *Icones Biblicae*, with an identifiable but subtle allusion to both Biblical and Classical sources which involved an aspect of teaching or learning — something which required specific knowledge of the original context of these four figures (on the familiarity of Jews with Classical antiquity, see Berger 1992).

Is it possible that a similar type of allusion — although perhaps one only known to the engraver himself — underpinned the choice of the image from Roman history, and in doing so suggesting a parallel between Romulus and Moses? Both were, of course, major figures in establishing their nations, albeit in very different ways; both were, as infants, cast adrift in a river. Neither similarity, however, seems an adequate link: even the latter is a widespread mythic trope. Not only are the positive associations weak or general, but there may well have been a strong disincentive to make such a connection. Rome was, after all, from the first century seen by Jews as not only an oppressive enemy in this world, but as a representation of evil more generally. Even the name ‘Romulus’ itself could be regarded as etymologically related to ‘Armilus’, a legendary name of the Messiah’s antagonist (Klatzkin 1971). In addition, one might bear in mind the broader social and political context and the use of what Schama has referred to as ‘patriotic scripture’ in the Calvinist Netherlands, where ‘years of crisis and prolonged military endeavour were likely to imprint on the Dutch mentality an awareness of their symbolic embodiment of resistance to Catholic absolutism’ (Schama 2004, 53) and where Rome came to stand for this enemy (see also van der Coelen 1996, 179). The use of this image seems therefore to go against this ‘emotional tide’ (Israel 1998, 644) of political as much as religious sensibilities.

Merian bypassed

The source of some scenes is harder to trace, but these may be more instructive. Two are relatively clumsily executed: an illustration of the Children of Israel leaving Raamses for Succoth and one captioned with a quotation from Joshua 24.2 regarding Abraham’s original idolatry and showing his rejection of this practice by smashing idols in Ur — a story which

is not in the Biblical text but is a well-known associated Jewish tradition (Yerushalmi 1975, 67). This scene is therefore specifically Jewish, for which a direct Christian source is unlikely. But this does not explain why other depictions of iconoclasm were not borrowed from one of several options among Merian's originals but were derived from elsewhere.

A third scene not taken from a Merian original shows Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law at Mount Sinai. Where Merian followed a common approach with Moses depicted kneeling on the side of the picture (*Icones Biblicae*, 1. XVII), here the mountain is central, with Moses holding aloft the tablets at the peak. In her analysis of the development of images in the *Tsene-U'rene*, Heyd considers this to be a deliberate rejection of Merian's composition because it had implications of a prefiguring of 'Christ praying at Gethsemane' in favour of a more Jewish concept of the centrality of the Commandments (Heyd 1984, 82; see, for example, Clifton and Melion 2009, Figure 11). This arrangement had already been used in the title pages of the Yiddish Bible published by Uri Fayvesh Halevi in Amsterdam in 1678 and more clearly in that of Joseph Athias in 1679 (Aptroot 1996; Heyd 1984, 82; Berger 2006). The scene (Figure 5) was, however, reworked in the *Haggadah* either from these or another source, such as the etching prepared by Sébastien Leclerc I for the *Histoire Sacrée en Tableaux* about 1670.⁶ The foreground was, however, now populated with individuals conscripted and modified from various scenes in the *Historische Chronik* (including Figures 142, 185 and 204), and thus conforming to the overall style of the *Haggadah* illustrations (Figure 6). The title page of the 1678 Yiddish Bible also provided Abraham ben Jacob with the model for the architectonic frontispiece with the central text flanked by figures of Moses and Aaron standing in front of draped columns (Wischnitzer 1931, 31).

In turn, these, and other images reworked from the Amsterdam *Haggadah*, replaced many of the illustrations in the second Sulzbach edition of the *Tsene-U'rene* (sometimes given a new meaning, so that the 'Children of Israel leaving Rameses' referred to above became 'Abraham leaving Haran'). Here, again, it is possible that a more sophisticated understanding of source, content and symbol led to the choice of a depiction more appropriate in a Jewish context (Heyd 1984, 82; Wischnitzer 1965, 130).

Another innovation in the Amsterdam *Haggadah* was the inclusion of a fold-out map of the 'Holy Land' and the route of the Children of Israel in Sinai (mirroring a Dutch interest in maps and the Israelites' route through Sinai). Here Abraham ben Jacob drew on a map based on Adrichom's 1590 map (Rubin 2001; Brodsky 1993/4; Stern 2010-11), such as those published by Hondius and Mercator (1639), Jansson and Hornius (1653), Visscher (1660) or included in Keur's Dutch Bible of 1687.⁷ References to Christianity in the source map were removed, the place names given in Hebrew, with other selections or emphases used to highlight elements relevant to Passover, sometimes alluding to or making use of Jewish analyses of geography

(Brodsky 1993/4, 150-153). Brodsky also sees additional significance in the additional illustrations and identifies ‘mistakes’ made deliberately to provide puzzles to be referred to and solved during the *Seder* every year (Brodsky 1993/4, 151-152). Perhaps more important than the specific source or content is the concept of including a map of this kind, emulating contemporary Christian interests.

Discussion

By 1695 both of the Jewish communities in the Netherlands, each numbering about 3000 people (Israel 2002, 100, Table 3.1) were well established and accepted. They had a clear place within broader society, in practice if not fully in law, but still needed to consciously and constantly conform to general social mores (Sutcliffe 2008; cf Kaplan 2002, 160-161). At the same time as maintaining their distinct identity (Sutcliffe 2008, 30; Bodian 1997), they, especially the wealthier and better educated Sephardim, adopted fashions and aesthetic sensibilities of their Dutch neighbours, emulating them by displaying similar tastes, which they could satisfy to the extent allowed by law and custom, and with an eye to political sensitivities. Such a sensitivity can be seen in other cases. Berger, for example, notes the different target audiences of images used in the title pages of Athias’s Yiddish Bible of 1679 (Berger 2006). While the main images were aimed at the Jewish reader, an emblem of the Dutch Republic and a political slogan employed in the Republic was directed towards the local provincial authorities who provided the publisher with a privilege guaranteeing his monopoly for selling the book.

Sixteenth and seventeenth century Holland was a visually literate society where paintings of the great masters as well as more humble woodcuts and engravings were ubiquitous, appreciated and widely understood. A major aspect of this was, of course, the rich tradition of illustrated Bibles and series of Biblical prints and associated maps (Rubin 2001; Clifton and Melion 2009; van der Coelen 1996). By the later seventeenth century Jewish communities, ready to emulate their neighbours, were able to do so in an internally appropriate way through the *Haggadah*. Externally, the Amsterdam *Haggadah* was also part of a broader program of naturalising the Jewish community, demonstrating its common and unexceptionable shared references to Biblical tradition.

Of course the production of this, as any other, work was based on a perceived readiness for a new, more contemporary look and feel for a standard work. Matthaus Merian’s Biblical pictures had already been introduced to Yiddish-speaking, Ashkenazi Jews through the woodcuts accompanying the Sulzbach *Tsene-U’rene*. Although far from canonical, his imagery was widely accepted, and therefore had become an uncontroversial source within the Jewish world as well as conforming to normative images of the biblical past. The scenes selected for the 1695 *Haggadah* needed to fit within a tradition of appropriate illustrations and to connect with and

emphasise key points in the text. Although their efficacy as entertainment may be questioned (Cohen 1998, 94-95) they nevertheless provided an important visual supplement to the text, most obviously with the inclusion of pictures of Moses, who otherwise would not appear in the *Haggadah*.

In the second half of the seventeenth century Amsterdam was the most important centre for Hebrew printing for both Sephardi and Ashkenazi worlds (Kaplan 2002, 138; Heller 2010, xxii-xxxiv; Schrijver 2017). There would have been extreme competition in this congested world. Printers/publishers would have had a keen eye for business opportunities which would repay the investment in editing, typesetting and production, even if the risk was relatively low (Cohen 1998, 91). In this context the consortium of Moses ben Joseph Wesel (as the financier), Asher Anshel ben Eliezer and Immanuel Beer ben Eliezer made the commercial decision to produce a replacement for the century-old Venice *Haggadah*, with the addition of the new suite of illustrations as a major selling-point. There can be no doubt as to the success of this venture, especially after Solomon ben Joseph Proops bought up the printing works and prepared the 1712 edition, which incorporated many popular elements of the old familiar Venice editions, perhaps to appeal more to the Sephardic community. These re-introductions included, most obviously, numerous illustrated initial letters and sets of miniatures explaining the sequence of the *Seder* and the plagues in Egypt. The text was entirely re-set, and although making use of Abraham ben Jacob's 1695 engravings, these were altered, simplified or perhaps re-cut entirely and his name was removed from the revised and simplified title-page where a single image of Moses (copied from *Icones Biblicae* I: XXXVI) replaced the six biblical scenes in small roundels. Some minor details also show evidence of a close familiarity with the Venice *Haggadah*, as in the inclusion of a small image of idol worshippers in the distant background of the picture of the recovery of Moses from the Nile by Pharaoh's daughter. There are also unexpected, new details — as in the secondary scene included with the main image of Abraham, Sarah and the three angels. Here there is a cross on top of a spire in the far shore of the river across which Abraham was rowing (Figure 7). Unlike the inadvertent inclusion of a cross on the picture of the Temple, this was a deliberate introduction in the 1712 *Haggadah* — perhaps a deliberate, if subtle, reference to a place where Jews were unwelcome and should leave, mirroring the migration of Portuguese Jews to the Netherlands.

In this environment, where art played so large a part in social definition and identity, it need be no surprise that the Jewish community looked to follow fashions and practices of their Christian neighbours — to demonstrate commonality of aspects of belief. The adoption of popular images of biblical scenes, the same as those widespread in Holland generally, can be seen as part of this claim to a shared tradition. The use of Merian-derived images can therefore be seen as a particular conforming strategy, so that this *Haggadah* provided the community with a way of demonstrating common ground,

common imagery, and shared visions of a common past and to some extent, belief, even if there were variations in detail, motivation, symbolism, attitude, and significance. Here we see a blend of commercial nous with an understanding of social and symbolic values contributing to the success of this venture.

Early Modern Europe drew on two main sources for understanding and envisaging the past: the Bible and Classical Greek and Roman legend and history. These were accorded equivalent status and used in conjunction to construct a seamless story from the creation of the world, through the Classical world and on to later times. At some points, of course, these two main sets of source material intersected, just as the Greek and Roman world interacted with that of the Near East. This is clearly seen in the vision of world history in Gottfried's *Historische Chronik*, where no distinction is made between secular and sacred history in either text or illustration. In a more religious context, however, many illustrations prepared for Christian audiences were used to highlight interpretations of Old Testament themes as prefiguring events in the New (Clifton and Melion 2009, 21). Such usage did not of course apply to Jewish illustrations. For Jews illustrations have always lacked the power or significance of icons, and the depiction of divinity is always avoided. While there was clearly emulation of different sorts — social, political and aesthetic — the borrowed images had a different value and significance to the viewer, where belief is taken for granted. This is especially so with the *Haggadah*, which is to a large extent concerned with the active engagement with history, emphasising continuity and identity, and where contemporary genre scenes, along with images of Talmudic sages, reinforced the core message of a seamless link between the past and present.

Even before the second edition of 1712, but increasingly afterwards, the imagery used in the Amsterdam *Haggadot* became naturalised, seen to be as much Jewish as gentile, and finding its way into a wide array of manuscript and printed *Haggadot* and other books or artworks (Peled-Carmeli 1983; Roth 1971). This can be attributed in part to a lack of interest in innovation and associated costs and risks by publishers and in part to an uncritical willingness of the market to accept — perhaps expect — simple variations on well-worn and comfortable illustrations (Cohen 1998, 94-97). As they took on a dominant life of their own, the original sources of these images were forgotten, even if they were ever recognised by many. The more they were used, the more they became standard, if not canonical, pictures of the past — uncontroversial both internally and in the broader European context.

Endnotes

1. This was also a time of growing interest in the diversity of religious traditions, enhanced by Bernard Picart and Jean Frederic Bernard's *Cérémonies et Coutumes Religieuses de Tous les Peuples du Monde* published in Amsterdam between 1723 and 1737, which began with the

sections of Judaism including well-known images of both public and private ceremonies. For the social and political context see Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt (2010), while Green (2022) suggests an openness to the non-Jewish gaze was a response to overcoming feelings of insecurity.

2. While some inappropriate, non-Jewish, elements in Abraham ben Jacob's engravings may be simple mistakes (such as a cross left on the roof of the depiction of the Temple (Stern 2010-11, n. 61) others have been ascribed to his background as a convert. Some apparent flaws may not be cultural misunderstandings, depending on how we read them. So, for example, while the *Seder* scene in the *Haggadah* (based on Merian's original in *Icones Biblicae* I: XXXIX) has been seen as an inaccurate representation of the normal family event, this could rather be identified as a direct depiction of the caption (an abbreviated version of Exodus 12:11) and the Sephardi custom of actively re-enacting the Exodus, with the men surrounding the table, staffs in hand.

3. As eloquently referred to in Heinrich Heine's unfinished novel, *The Rabbi of Bacharach*: "So sat today the beauteous Sara ... Now and then she looked at the Haggadah which lay before her, a beautiful book bound in gold and velvet. It was an old heirloom, with aged wine-stains on it, from her grandfather's days. There were ever so many boldly and brightly-painted pictures in it, which even as a child, she had been happy to look at on the Pesach night, and which represented all sorts of bible stories". For Heine's source, see Schrijver and Wieseemann (1997).

4. In the 1712 second edition this scene was reworked, so that Moses' staff was now angled back over his head. Merian's Romulus held the staff in his right hand and the reversal was a result of directly copying the original so that it was transferred to his left.

5. The *Haggadah* scene was, however, significantly simplified.

6. Finé de Brianville. 1670. *Histoire Sacrée en Tableaux*. Paris: Charles de Sercy,

7. Although justified by the caption above it referring to Exodus 19.4, the spread-eagle above the scale is very like the mark used by the famous Amsterdam printer Joseph Athias (Fuks and Fuks-Mannsfield, 1987, Figure 12: XI), perhaps providing grounds for suggesting that the map was originally prepared for him, but sold during the Athias family's period of bankruptcy in 1695.

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Figures

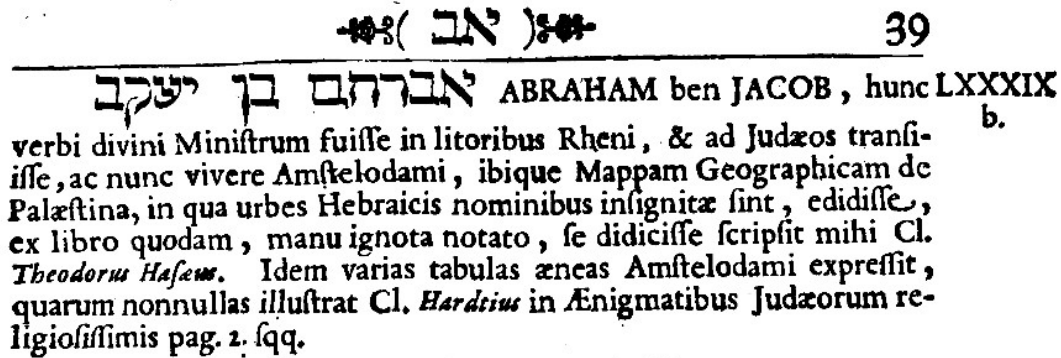


Figure 1: Entry in Wolf (1727, 39) referring to Abraham ben Jacob. Source: *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, public domain.



Figure 2: Moses killing the Egyptian, Amsterdam *Haggadah*, 1695. Source: Public domain.



Figure 3: Romulus killing Remus, Gottfried, *Historische Chronik*, 1619, Figure 45. Source: Public domain.



Figure 4. Detail of workmen and camels from Gottfried, *Historische Chronik*, 1619, Figure 16 (the Tower of Babel), which were transferred into the scene of Moses killing the Egyptian. Source: Public domain.



Figure 5: Moses receiving the Law at Mount Sinai, Amsterdam *Haggadah*, 1695. Source: Public domain.



Figure 6. Individual people taken from Gottfried, *Historische Chronik*, 1619, and transferred into the foreground of the Haggadah scene at Mount Sinai, a) Figure 99, b) Figure 142, c) Figure 185. Source: Public domain.

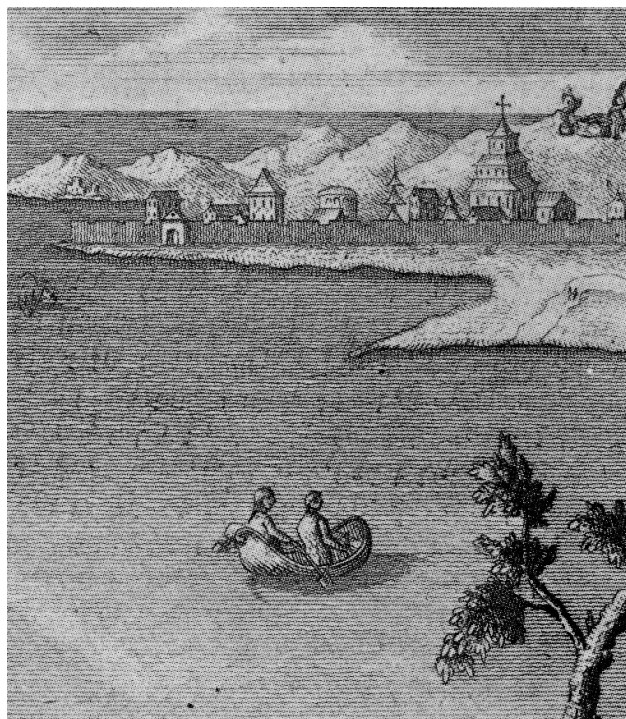


Figure 7. Detail from the 1712 Amsterdam *Haggadah* showing Abraham crossing the river, where one building on the far shore is clearly a church with a cross on the spire. Source: Public domain.