

Dragons: A Symbol of Evil in European Synagogue Decoration?

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At first glance, images of evil would seem to be an unexpected element in synagogue art. Only during a relatively short period in eighteenth-century eastern-European synagogues were paintings of predatory beasts and birds catching their prey depicted to convey the idea of the People of Israel pursued by enemies.¹ The theme of piety oppressing evil was also developed in depictions of the stork, *ḥasidah* in Hebrew, a symbol of a *ḥasid* (“pious”), catching a snake, a primary symbol of Satan and evil.² However, most of the symbols and allegories used in synagogues represent Torah, divine dispensation of worldly life, undying faith, remembrance of the Sanctuary, longing for the Holy Land, messianic expectations, and moral virtues. Such a minor part of synagogue representations of antagonistic powers contrasts with the thematic repertoire of church art,

where the scenes of evil in the form of anthropoid devils and satanic beasts punishing the heretics, threatening the faithful, but being repressed by the true faith were frequent. Yet, archaeological finds from medieval synagogues in France and Germany and several images from eastern European synagogues in the early modern period suggest that symbols of evil in synagogues have a far lengthier history.

The origins of the zoomorphic representations of evil can be traced back to dragon images from the earliest Ashkenazi synagogues. Reliefs of a dragon (fig. 1) and a lion (fig. 2) were discovered on the southern façade of the medieval synagogue in Rouen.³ The dragon carved on the base of a half-column has a canine head, partly damaged, a protuberant tongue, a long body with a small wing, and a serpent-like coiled tail ending in a tassel.

1 Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Architecture of the European Synagogue* (Philadelphia, 1964), 132; Ida Huberman, *Living Symbols: Symbols in Jewish Art and Tradition* (Tel Aviv, 1996), 25–26, 83; Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park, Penn., 1997), 16–38. In contrast, Thomas Hubka considers these predator scenes as illustrations of the allegories in the Book of Zohar warning “the righteous about the dangers that await those who fail to keep God’s commandments,” but not as “representations of evil or evil acts” (Thomas C. Hubka, *Resplendent Synagogue: Architecture and Worship in an Eighteenth-Century Polish Community* [Hanover, 2003], 101–02). In fact, there is no contradiction between allegorical representations of predator and hunt scenes as evil acts alluding “to the persecutions of the Jewish people by restrictions, pogroms, and repressive governments” (*ibid.*, 101) and the moralizing intention “to communicate ethical teachings to their viewers” (*ibid.*, 102). The Jews accepted evil deeds and persecutions that they experienced from the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem onwards as God’s retribution to the People of Israel who had abandoned the Torah. This ethical apprehension of contemporary events is revealed in the reaction of eastern-European Jews to the

Chmielnicki massacres in 1648–49, the memory of which was still alive in the first half of the eighteenth century when the predatory scenes appeared in Polish synagogues (Alan L. Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* [New York, 1984], 102–105; Joel Raba, *Between Remembrance and Denial: The Fate of the Jews in the Wars of the Polish Commonwealth during the Mid-Seventeenth Century as Shown in Contemporary Writings and Historical Research* [New York, 1995], 44, 67–69). Moreover, the traditional Jewish interpretations of the Bible that combined literal, allusive, homiletical, and mystical meanings of the text would have taught the synagogue congregation to apprehend the predator pictures as a hint at contemporary historical events, didactic precept, and also as an abstract allegory of worldly evil.

2 Rachel Wischnitzer [Wischnitzer-Bernstein], *Symbole und Gestalten der jüdischen Kunst* (Berlin, 1935), 64; *idem*, *Architecture*, 131–32. See also Rudolf Wittkower, “Eagle and Serpent: A Study in Migration of Symbols,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 2 (1939): 293–325.

3 See a description and a bibliography on the synagogue in Jacques Tanguy, *The Jewish Monument in the Palais of Justice of Rouen* (Rouen, 1999).



Fig. 1. (left) Rouen, Synagogue. Dragon relief on the base of a stone column on the southern façade, 1096–1116

Fig. 2. (right) Rouen, Synagogue. Upside-down relief of a lion on the base of a stone column on the southern façade, 1096–1116

The lion relief is found in an upside-down position under a column.⁴ The lion’s additional body attached to its head relates to the scheme of “one head – two bodies” characteristic of Romanesque sculpture (e.g., fig. 3).⁵ Basing herself on the stylistic resemblance of the reliefs in Rouen to the architectonic decoration in Norman churches of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, Maylis Baylé dated the dragon and lion to the period of

the building of the synagogue between ca. 1096 and 1116.⁶

These two reliefs, as poor evidence as they seem, are the earliest surviving remnants of zoomorphic decorations in Ashkenazi synagogues. Due to the durability of stone, a few sculpted images are the only remaining objects from medieval synagogue decoration, which, as is apparent from written sources, included also paintings of plants and animals.⁷ The earliest known responsum discussing the use of images in synagogues was written by Rabbi Eliakim ben Joseph of Mainz (born ca. 1070), a contemporary of the builders of the synagogue in Rouen.⁸ He stated that the “shapes of lions and נחשים [nehashim, Heb., snakes]” had been “formed in the windows” of the north wall of the synagogue in Cologne that was established ca. 1000.⁹ Most modern scholars accept Eliakim’s note as a reference to stained glass windows.¹⁰ Eliakim conceded that the intention of the community making the decorations was “for the sake of heaven, to be

4 Maylis Baylé assumed from this position, the fact that the lion stands on an astragal, and the form of the stone on which it is carved that all these are more appropriate for a column’s capital rather than for a base. She suggested that the stone with the lion relief was originally a capital that was later inverted for use as a column’s base (Maylis Baylé, “Les monuments juifs de Rouen et l’architecture romane,” in *Art et archéologie des juifs en France médiévale*, ed. Bernhard Blumenkranz [Toulouse, 1980], 263–64). The supposition of a transfer of synagogue reliefs and their being turned around is reinforced by the palm tree relief from the same façade of the Rouen synagogue that was found in secondary usage in the wall, turned 90° on its side (ibid., 262–63; Bernhard Blumenkranz, “La synagogue à Rouen [env. 1100],” *Archives juives* 13, no. 3 [1977]: 41). Nevertheless, it is also possible that the upside-down position of the lion is original, for in French Romanesque churches malevolent beasts were sometimes originally carved in an inverted position (e.g., fig. 4), most likely in order to represent them as defeated and fallen.

5 Anna Roes, “Histoire d’une bête,” *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* (1935): 313–28; Baylé, “Les monuments juifs,” 263, 274 n. 24.

6 Ibid., 263–64, 272–73. Cf. also Michael D. Gosten and Catherine Oakes, *Romanesque Churches of the Loire and Western France* (Stroud, 2000), 112–13.

7 Isaac Ze’ev Kahana, *Mehkarim be-sifrut ha-teshuvot* (Studies in the Responsa Literature) (Jerusalem, 1973), 350ff. (Hebrew).

8 Eliakim of Mainz was the father-in-law of Rabbi Eliezer bar Nathan of Mainz (known as Raben, active in the first half of the twelfth century). Ravi’ah (Rabbi Eliezer ben Joel Ha-Levi of Bonn, 1140–1225) called Eliakim zaken (Heb., “old man” or “elder,” also meaning a “sage”), leading most scholars to conclude that Eliakim of Mainz belonged to an older generation. They supposed that Eliakim

was born in 1070 (Kahana, *Mehkarim*, 351–52 and n. 19) and was still active in 1152 (*Germania Judaica* [1], eds. Ismar Elbogen, Aron Freimann, and Chaim Tykocinski [Wrocław, 1934], 71–72).

9 Eliakim’s responsum is known through a later citation in the treatise *Avi Ezri* compiled by Ravi’ah that is found in the *Or Zarua* by Isaac ben Moses (ca. 1180–ca. 1250) (“Avodah Zarah,” *Or Zarua*, no. 203; Rabbinical literature found in the Bar-Ilan University Responsa Project database is quoted according to the CD version 12.0, 1972–2004). On this responsum and its textual versions see also Kahana, *Mehkarim*, 351–53. It is unclear whether Eliakim had seen the synagogue in Cologne himself or based his decision on the text of the question posed to him and on the images of snakes and lions that he could have seen elsewhere in contemporary art. On the medieval synagogue in Cologne, see Otto Doppelfeld, “Die Ausgrabungen im Kölner Judenviertel,” in *Die Juden in Köln von den ältesten Zeiten bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Zvi Asaria (Cologne, 1959), 71–145.

10 Adolf Kober and Zvi Asaria, “Die Kölner Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis zur Schwelle unseres Jahrhunderts,” in *Die Juden in Köln*, 45; Wischnitzer, *Architecture*, 52; Kahana, *Mehkarim*, 353; Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (New York, 1996), 45. These windows should be dated to the reconstruction of the synagogue of Cologne in 1096. Such an early date for the stained-glass windows is possible, as the earliest written mention of “windows containing various histories” in the Cathedral of Reims is from 970 to 989, and a simply decorated fragment of window glass dated to the period before the twelfth century was excavated at the Cologne Cathedral. On these examples and more evidence on early stained-glass windows, see Charles Reginald Dodwell, *The Pictorial Art of the West, 800–1200* (New Haven, 1993), 375–76.



Fig. 3. Poitiers, Notre Dame la Grande Church, stone relief of a lion with one head and two bodies, detail of the façade decoration, second half of the 11th century

pleasing to their Creator,” but opposed these designs in the synagogue, lest they divert the concentration of the worshipper from his prayers and from the service. Eliakim especially objected to images of snakes because they might be seen as idolatrous. He stated that snakes must be destroyed just as Hezekiah, king of Judah, broke Moses’ brazen serpent that the people had turned into an idol (2 Kings 18:4). In Eliakim’s opinion, “a snake (*naḥash*) is a dragon in all” and therefore could be considered a possible idol, since the Mishnah associates dragons with pagan images. Avodah Zarah 3:3 forbade having in one’s possession any utensil with a depiction of a dragon on it, demanding of everybody who found such vessels to “throw them into the Dead Sea,” i.e., to discard them.

Eliakim’s association of snakes with dragons suggests that those in question in Cologne were not limbless serpents but monstrous winged reptiles with claws like a beast or bird of prey, such as the dragons frequently depicted in contemporary ecclesiastic art (e. g., figs. 4, 7,



Fig. 4. Lavardin, Saint Genest Church. Stone relief of an upside-down dragon on an arch’s impost in the main nave, late 11th century

12, 19–21). Thus the brazen serpent mentioned by Eliakim was often represented as a dragon in Christian art.¹¹ By interpreting the snakes as dragons, Eliakim had broadened the narrow Talmudic formula, but he also reflected medieval Christian and Jewish traditions that did not make a clear distinction between these two creatures: in German, such dragons, often with a serpentine reed or coiled tail, would be called *Würme* or *Lindwurme*, terms used also for snakes.¹² The Talmudic commentaries of the eleventh and twelfth centuries constantly identified dragons with snakes.¹³ Literally reading the definition of dragons in the Talmud as a creature having “frills rising between its spinal and cervical vertebrae,”¹⁴ the “snakes” might not have been identified by the Jews of medieval Cologne with the dragon whose depiction is forbidden. This reading of Eliakim’s “lions and snakes” is borne out by the combination of the serpent-like dragon and lion on the façade of the synagogue in Rouen.¹⁵ However, dragons had

11 E.g., note a dragon-shaped serpent on the “brazen column” of Moses at the left side of the sculptural porch of the north transept of the Chartres Cathedral, 1194.

12 See *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens*, eds. Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer and Hans Bachtold-Staubli (Berlin, 1938–41), 9:840–58; *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart, 1959), 4:245.

13 See the commentaries of Rashi on Berakhot 62b, Bava Batra 16b, Avodah Zarah 42b, and of Rashbam (R. Samuel ben Meir, ca. 1080–ca. 1160) on Bava Batra 16b. For a brief review and several more examples of the interchangeability of serpent and dragon in rabbinical literature, see Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion* (n. 1 above), 72ff.

14 Avodah Zarah 43a. See also the Tosefta, Avodah Zarah 5:2.

15 Associating snakes with dragons, Eliakim used the Mishnaic definition דראקון (*drakon*), derived from Greek δράκων. This definition can refer to any mythical monster combining ophidian and bestial structure such as those depicted in different forms in ancient Mesopotamian,

Egyptian, Canaanite, Anatolian, and Hellenistic art. A minor use of dragon-shaped ornaments like those discussed in Avodah Zarah 3:3 is mentioned in the Pesikta attributed to Abba bar Kahana from the late third century, which states that “one of the daughters of Zion [...] formed a shape of dragon on her footwear” (Pesikta de-Rav kahana [B. Mandelbaum edition] 17:6 [Hebrew]). On the meaning and uses of the definition *drakon* in rabbinical literature, see Margarete Schlüter, “*Deraqôn*” und Götzendienst: Studien zur antiken jüdischen Religionsgeschichte, ausgehend von einem griechischen Lehnwort in mAZ III 3 (Frankfurt on the Main, 1982). On semantics of dragons in traditional cultures, see Grafton Elliot Smith, *Evolution of the Dragon* (Manchester, 1919); Ernest Ingersoll, *Dragons and Dragon Lore* (New York, 1928); Wilhelm Bölsche, *Drachen, Sage und Naturwissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1929). A general review of various dragon images in ancient art is found in Heinz Adolf Mode, *Fabulous Beasts and Demons* (London, 1975), 116ff.

no developed tradition in ancient Jewish art, as did lions.¹⁶

The nearest dragon images known to Jews of the early Ashkenazi communities in France and Germany would have been the dragons frequently used in Christian art during the Romanesque and Gothic periods. Such dragons, with or without wings and having one or two pairs of legs, were rendered in different styles depending on the period and region, the workshop, and the skill of the artist. However, all these images have in common an emphasized tongue and a coiled tail ending in petaled tassels.¹⁷ For example, in the eleventh-century relief of a dog-like animal in Saint Genest Church in Lavardin (fig. 4), a protuberant tongue and a coiled tail with a tassel indicate that this is a dragon. The origins of the visual representation of dragons having a serpent-like coiled tail can be traced back to Sassanian depictions of Senmerw (fig. 5), a miraculous dog-headed bird, which were adopted into reliefs in Italian churches by the beginning of the eighth century (fig. 6).¹⁸



Fig. 5. Silver gilt Sassanian dish depicting Senmerw, 7th century.
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The Christian theological concept of dragons was derived from their association with the biblical monster תנין (*tannin*),¹⁹ and with the “old serpent” that is Satan who accuses people before God in the Last Judgment.²⁰ The development of the iconography of the

16 The reliefs of monsters surviving in poor condition on the base of the seven-branched candelabrum on the Arch of Titus in Rome may not be used as evidence of a Jewish tradition as some scholars believed (e.g., Paul Carus, *The History of Devil and the Idea of Devil from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* [New York, 1969], 73). In fact, this base is a later addition to the original structure of the Temple menorah (Daniel Sperber, “The History of the Menorah,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 16 [1965]: 135–59; idem, “Between Jerusalem and Rome: The History of the Base of the Menorah as Depicted on the Arch of Titus,” in *In the Light of the Menorah: Story of a Symbol*, ed. Yael Israeli [Jerusalem, 1998], 50–53). However, the Jews of medieval Italy may well have known this image and believed it to be a true representation of the Temple’s menorah. The monsters with coiled tails might have legitimized the representation of dragons with coiled tails in synagogues. On lion images in ancient Jewish art, see Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 13 vols. (New York, 1953–68), 7:59–86; Yehuda L. Bialer, “Symbols in Jewish Art and Tradition,” *Ariel* 21 (1967): 5–21; [Jehuda Felix and Louis Isaac Rabinowitz], “Lion,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), 11: 262–76; Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora* (Leiden, 1998), 382–84; idem, *Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel* (Leiden, 1988), 321–28.

17 On dragons and other evil beasts in Gallic and Anglo-Norman ecclesiastic art in the Romanesque period, see Faith Sargent Lewis Johnson, “A Romanesque Capital at Ely Cathedral,” *The Journal of Antiquaries* 66, no. 1 (1986): 130–31; Marcel Durliat, “La sculpture du XIe siècle en Occident,” *Bulletin monumental* 151, no. 1 (1994): 129–244; Marcel Angheben, “Le combat du guerrier contre un animal

fantastique: à propos de trois chapiteaux de Vézelay,” *Bulletin monumental* 152, no. 3 (1994): 245–56.

18 The impact of Sassanian art is obvious in the design of a church chancel screen from Pavia dated to the first half of the eighth century (fig. 6): Senmerw’s head, with its small ears, open mouth, and jutting tongue, its outstretched forepaws, the wings as if growing from the forepaws, the shape of the long parallel feathers and the wings’ upper edge elegantly curved outwards, and the spiraling patterns with leafy endings on the tail would have served as a model for the pair of beasts in the church relief. The remarkable changes made by the carver of the relief from Pavia are the mane and the heavy forepaws with great claws, and a longer coiled tail of the beasts. In contrast to the dog-like paws, smooth neck, and vertically arranged bird’s tail of Senmerw, the new features impart to the beast a resemblance to both lion and snake. On Senmerw (modern Farsi: Simurgh), its images and their influence on Christian art, see Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis, *Persian Myths* (London, 1993), 21–22; Prudence Oliver Harper, “The Senmurv,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 20 (1961): 95–101; Dominique Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art* (London, 1995), 208–10, 217–18, figs. 175–76, 183–84.

19 The Hebrew *tannin* (pl. *tanninim*) is translated as *δράκων* in the Septuagint and *draco* in the Vulgate. See also Nicholas K. Kiessling, “Antecedents of the Medieval Dragon in Sacred History,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1970): 167–77; Anca Bratu, “Dragon,” in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, eds. André Vauchez, Barrie Dobson, and Michael Lapidge, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2000), 1:449.

20 “[...] Draco ille magnus serpens antiquus qui vocatur Diabolus et Satanus qui seducit universum orbem proiectus est in terram” (Vulgate, Rev. 12:9).



Fig. 6. Pavia, Santa-Maria Teodote della Pusterla Cloister. *The Tree of Life Flanked by Dragons*, first half of 8th century, relief on stone chancel screen. Pavia, Musei Civici

Tree of Life in Romanesque art also established a relation of the creatures flanking the Tree to Psalm 91:13 that describes the *tannin* or פִּתָּן (*peten*, asp), both identified as serpent-like dragons,²¹ and lions. For instance, in an eleventh-century relief above the southern portal of the St. Nicola chapel in Wartenberg near Munich (fig. 7), the Tree of Life is flanked by a Senmerw-like winged dragon and a lion. Identifying God trampling the dragon and lion in Psalms with Christ, the early theologians and the Church Fathers interpreted both these beasts as Satan, or an allegory of the sins and the unfaithful.²² Whereas some early Christian depictions of this pair of beasts show a lion vis-à-vis a naturalistically rendered serpent,²³ a snake-like dragon became a usual representation of Satan in Romanesque and Gothic art.

Therefore, the dragon imagery in medieval churches, as diverse as it was, may not be considered as merely ornamental. Images depicting dragons – as well as asps and lions – being trampled under the feet of Christ, Mary, Saints, and Ecclesia, and therefore also under the supports of church portals, columns, arches, or beams, as well as under chairs and pulpits, symbolized satanic powers defeated by the True Faith.²⁴ For example, the location of the dragon from Lavardin on an impost (fig. 4) evokes the impression of evil repressed by the massive masonry arch of the actual church building and the inverted position of this image shows it as if fallen upside down. Malevolent beasts stood for devils hunting for human souls, visualizing belief in evil powers that attack the church as a shelter of faith.²⁵ The symbolism of the dragon as an allegory of evil

21 The Hebrew *peten*, translated as ἀσπίς in the Septuagint and *aspis* in the Vulgate, is commonly understood as a poisonous snake.

22 E.g., Origen and St. Augustine of Hippo on Psalm 93. The same association is stressed by Honorius of Autun (active 1106–1135) in his book of sermons *Speculum Ecclesiae* (Patrologia Latina, 172), cols. 913–14. On snakes and snake-like dragons as a symbol of Satan and death in Byzantine art see Emma Maayan-Fanar, “Byzantine Pictorial Initials of the Post-Iconoclastic Period: From the End of the 9th Century to the Early 11th Century,” (Ph.D. thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2003), 221–23, 264–73.

23 E.g., the late-sixth- or seventh-century mosaic in Archbishop St. Andrea’s oratory in Ravenna shows Christ as a warrior trampling on a lion and a long legless serpent.

24 On the origins and development of medieval Christian depictions of the triumphant figure trampling or impaling a serpent-like enemy, see André Grabar, *L’Empereur dans l’art byzantin* (Paris, 1936); Fritz Saxl,

“The Ruthwell Cross,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 6 (1943): 12–13, figs. 9–25; Émile Mâle, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France in the Thirteenth Century* (New York, 1958), 43–44; Christa Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden, 1960), 32–33; Gertrud Schiller, *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst*, (Gütersloh, 1971), 3:131–35; Kathleen M. Openshaw, “Weapons in the Daily Battle: Images of the Conquest of Evil in the Early Medieval Psalter,” *Art Bulletin* 75, no. 1 (1993): 17–38; Carol L. Neuman de Vegvar, “The Origin of the Genoels-Elderen Ivories,” *Gesta* 29 (1990): 8–25; Maylis Baylé, “La lutte contre le dragon dans l’iconographie des saints en Normandie,” in *Les saints dans la Normandie médiévale*, eds. Pierre Bouet and François Neveux (Caen, 2000), 171–87.

25 Marcel Pobé and Joseph Gantner, *Romanesque Art in France* (London, 1956), 32–33; Georges Duby, *The Making of the Christian West, 980–1140* (Geneva, 1967), 65–77; Regine Pernoud, Madelaine



Fig. 7. Wartenberg, St. Nicola Chapel. *Dragon and Lion Flanking the Tree*, 11th century, stone relief above the southern portal. Courtesy of the Bildarchiv Foto Marburg



Fig. 8. *Winged Dragon*, Worms *Mahzor*, vol.1, Germany (Würzburg?), 1272. Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library, Heb. 4^o 781/1, fol. 131r. Courtesy by the Department of Manuscripts and Archives, the Jewish National and University Library

in the ecclesiastic art of France and Germany was popularized by folk customs and tales. The Jews of Rouen were probably aware of Christian processions bearing the figure of a dragon.²⁶ The Jews of Worms were acquainted with local medieval legends that derived the name of the town as well as the dragon on the city's coat-of-arms from the *Wurm*, a monstrous dragon that threatened the town but was slain by a hero.²⁷

The belief in the existence of evil serpentine creatures became a part of the demonology and magic in teachings of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz (Heb., “pious of Germany”), a

mystical movement in medieval Jewry.²⁸ Like the Christian theologians who interpreted the *tanninim* as dragons, Rabbi Eleazar Rokeah of Worms (ca. 1165–1230), a prominent scholar of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz, described the *tanninim* as dragon-like monsters, writing in his commentary on Genesis 1:21 that they are “great, simple, and long creatures, and fire emerges from their mouths.” He also considered that the “Great Leviathan,” a huge sea serpent, is a species of the *tanninim*.²⁹ Eleazar accepted both the *tanninim* and Leviathan as malevolent powers challenging Divine rule of the world, and believed

Pernoud, and Marye Davy, *Sources et clefs de l'art roman* (Paris, 1973), 355–57, 360; Viviane Minne-Sève and Herve Kergall, *Romanesque and Gothic France: Architecture and Sculpture* (New York, 2000), 85–87.

26 Christian citizens of Rouen walked in procession with a wicker figure of a winged dragon to celebrate the legendary deliverance of the town from the malicious dragon by St. Romain (d. 638). The first written testimonies of this legend are from the thirteenth century, but it would have appeared earlier, possibly when the saint's bones were transferred to the cathedral of Rouen at the end of the eleventh or the beginning of the twelfth century. This custom continued there until 1753. Folk ceremonies with a figure of a dragon existed also in Tarascon and in Furth (James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, part 1: *The Magic Art and Evolution of Kings* [London, 1932], 2:163–70; Louis Dumont, *La Tarasque: Essai de description d'un fait local d'un point de vue ethnographique* [Paris, 1951]). A dragon was also carried and then destroyed to symbolize Christ's victory over evil in so-called Rogation processions practiced in

medieval France (Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* [Princeton, 1993], 2:23–24; Bratu, “Dragon” [n. 19 above]; Pierre-Marie Gy, “Rogations,” in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages* [n. 19 above], 2:1249).

27 Eugen Kranzbühler, *Worms und Heldensage* (Worms, 1930), 84ff. In his book *Ma'aseh nissim* (Story of Wonders; Hebrew) written in the 1660s, Juspa (Yephtah Joseph ben Naphtali, ca. 1604–78), a *shammes* (Yiddish, beadle) of the Worms synagogue, recorded a version of this toponymic tale, calling the dragon *lint wurm* (Shlomo Eidelberg, *R. Juspa, Shammash of Warmaisa [Worms]: Jewish Life in 17th Century Worms* [Jerusalem, 1991], 82–84, no. 15).

28 Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York, 1970), 40, 257; “Ḥasidei Ashkenaz,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 7 (Jerusalem, 1971), 1379.

29 Eleazar Rokeah stated that “*Tanninim* in gematria equal ‘the Great Leviathan’,” (Eleazar Rokeah, *Perush ha-Rokeah al ha-Torah* [Rokeah's Interpretations on the Torah], [Bnei Brak, 1986], 1:64 [Hebrew]).



Fig. 9. *The Feast of Shavu'ot*, Double *Maḥzor*, vol. 1, Germany, Württemberg (Esslingen?), ca. 1290. Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats-und-Universitätsbibliothek, MS. A 46a, fol. 202v

that in the eschatological future God will destroy them all, as is prophesied in Psalms.³⁰ The esoteric scholarly discourse probably reflected popular beliefs of a much wider stratum of Jewish society. The Jews of medieval

France and Germany would have easily associated fabulous dragons in the surrounding Christian milieu with the supernatural serpent-like malevolent beasts from the Bible and thus introduced this new image into synagogue

30 “You smashed the heads of the *tanninim*” (Ps. 74:13) and “crushed the heads of Leviathans” (Ps. 74:14). See a discussion of the *tanninim* vs.

the Leviathan in Eleazar’s teaching in Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion* (n. 1 above), 78–79.



Fig. 10. *A Man Blowing the Shofar before the Ark*, *Maḥzor* for High Holidays, Germany (Constance?), first quarter of 14th century. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle, Ms. 24 H, fol. 84v

decoration. A thirteenth-century midrashic anthology, *Yalkut Shim'oni*,³¹ repeating amoraic midrash,³² described Satan as an adversary who incessantly attacks whenever people find repose and gratification. In light of such legends, the evil in daily life appeared as a result of the machination of invisible powers that could have been shown in the form of satanic beasts. The adoption of the monsters trampled under columns in the synagogue of Rouen reinterpreted this motif for its Jewish meaning: not the church but the synagogue is now a symbol of the true faith defeating evil.

The popular Romanesque imagery of malevolent beasts was revived, though in different styles, in Hebrew manuscripts by the mid-thirteenth century, soon after Jews began to illuminate them in the 1230s. Thus hornlike ears, long coiled neck, great wing, bird's legs, and elegant outline of the body with a dragon's tail in the

31 Pericope Noah, sign 42.

32 Gen. Rabbah (Vilna edition), 38.



Fig. 11. *Satan and Jew Blowing a Shofar*, paintings flanking the signs for blowing a shofar, First Kaufmann *Maḥzor*, southern Germany, ca. 1270–90. Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, MS. A. 388/II, fol. 12v

1272 Worms *Maḥzor* (fig. 8) differ from the somewhat ugly shaped limbs of the dragon from Rouen (fig. 1), but both images implement the same combination of a dog-like head turning back and a long winged body continuing into a coiled tail with a leaf-like tassel. An obsolete Romanesque image of the bicorporate lion like that in Rouen (fig. 2) appears under a pillar in the painting on fol. 127v in the *Laud Maḥzor* from southern Germany, ca. 1290.³³ A painting decorating the *Adon imnani* poem in the German *Double Maḥzor* from ca. 1290 (fig. 9) gives us an example of dragons trampled under supports of an architectonic structure. The contents of the picture hint at the symbolism of the dragons. The dragons trampled underfoot bit the foundations of the pillars of a Gothic portal. This structure encloses a picture of Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law in the upper panel and giving them to the Israelites who gather at the sides of

33 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Laud Or. 321. See a reproduction in Bezalel Narkiss, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts* (Jerusalem, 1978), pl. 27.



Fig. 12. Conques, Sainte-Foy Abbey Church. *Dragon in the Door of St. Peter's Prison*, side view of stone capital with relief depicting deliverance of St. Peter, late eleventh or early 12th century

the lower panel and raise their arms to receive it. Under the word *Adon*, in the center, one Israelite stretches his hands instead towards a tower with crenellated parapets that surmount a lancet aperture with open doors. This appears to be the earthly receptacle of the Law that may signify both the Ark of the Covenant and the synagogue Torah ark. It would seem that the dragons under the portal, just as the dragon on the base of a synagogue column, allude to the malevolent persecutors who

threaten the Jewish people, but are defeated by the Torah.

Several paintings illuminating prayers for the High Holidays in Hebrew manuscripts from Germany reveal the role the image of dragon played in the contemporary Jewish mind. In an Ashkenazi prayer book for Rosh ha-Shanah dated to the first quarter of the fourteenth century from the collection of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris (fig. 10),³⁴ the dragon is drawn in a vertical position behind the back of a worshipper blowing a *shofar*. The man stands near the Torah ark, his right leg on the ark's steps. The synagogue ark is usually associated with the gate through which the human prayer ascends to the heavenly divine throne.³⁵ The blowing of the *shofar* in front of the Torah ark expresses the penitence of the whole congregation praying for the mercy of God who determines their destiny on the Day of Atonement. The Jews believed that Satan was attempting to disturb the synagogue worship in order to hinder God's pardon of human sins, but the sound of the *shofar* scared him off.³⁶ The position of the man, standing with one foot on a support to ensure his steady stance while blowing the *shofar*, was believed to debar Satan from preventing the proper performance of the sounds.³⁷ Satan fleeing from the sound of a *shofar* is depicted in the German prayer book for the High Holidays and Feast of Tabernacles from the early fourteenth century (fig. 11). In this picture, Satan appears as an anthropoid creature with horns, long spiral nose, wings, and bird's feet.³⁸ The dragon in the manuscript from the Alliance Israélite Universelle collection (fig. 10) is thus another zoomorphic representation of Satan in the scene of blowing the *shofar* in the synagogue. In contrast to man-

34 Gabrielle Sed-Rajna and Sonia Fellous, *Les manuscrits Hébreux enlumines des bibliothèques de France* (Leiden, 1994), 212.

35 Jer. 17:12; Midrash Tanḥuma (Warsaw edition): *Vayakhel* 7. On the portal and the synagogue ark as images of the heavenly gate, see also Rachel Wischnitzer "The Messianic Fox," in idem, *From Dura to Rembrandt* (Jerusalem, 1990), 71; Bracha Yaniv, "The Origins of the 'Two-Column Motif' in European Parokhot," *Jewish Art* 15 (1989): 26–43. On the motif of a heavenly gate in Jewish art, see Bernard Goldman, *The Sacred Portal* (Detroit, 1966). Note also the picture of an open Torah ark on page 23 in the German Floersheim Haggadah from 1502, discussed in Yael Zirlin's article "Discovering the Floersheim Haggadah" in this volume, p. 101.

36 Rosh ha-Shanah 16b.

37 [Albert L. Lewis], "Shofar," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), 14:1442–47. Daniel Sperber, "Zurat ha-amidah shel ba'al ha-toke'a, u-tekiah be-zad yamin" (The Stance of the Shofar Blower, and the Blowing on the Right Side) in idem, *Minhagei Yisrael*, 7 vols. (Jerusalem, 1989–2003), 7:239–51 (Hebrew).

38 Thérèse and Mendel Metzger, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1982), 246; Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael*, 6:18; 7:240 n. 6. The text written between the worshipper on the right margin of the page and Satan on the left margin contains signs for the consequence of different kinds of trumpet blasts to be sounded in the prayer, so that Satan actually looks as if he is running away from the sounds of the *shofar*.



Fig. 13. A Man Blowing the Shofar, *Mahzor* for High Holidays and Feast of Tabernacles, southern Germany (?), late 13th century. Vienna, Austrian National Library, E 30.113-C (Cod. Hebr. 174, fol. 19v). Bildarchiv d. ÖNB, Wien

like Satan running away, the satanic dragon approaches the synagogue ark and thrusts its long leaf-like tongue just over the worshipper's head as if trying to obstruct the sounds of the *shofar* from ascending to Heaven.

The dragon's smooth, thickened body, turned head, and small wing (fig. 10) remotely resemble the dragon image from Rouen (fig. 1). The dragon's position, as if standing on its tail behind the man's back, also has its prototype in Romanesque sculpture. For instance, a dragon depicted in a vertical position is located behind the back of the angel in the relief on a column's capital from the eleventh or the early twelfth century in the church of the Sainte-Foy Abbey in Conques (fig. 12). This dragon symbolizes Satan attempting to impede the deliverance of St. Peter from prison (Acts 12:7–19). The adoption of the "standing" dragon in Jewish manuscripts might have been legitimized by legends on biblical dragon-like serpents hanging in midair. Examples of such tales are Eleazar Rokeah's description of the Leviathan –

whom he believed to resemble a dragonlike *tannin* – standing on its tail before God,³⁹ or legends about the brazen serpent (Num. 21:8–9) that was thrown up and stood miraculously in the atmosphere.⁴⁰

The representation of a dragon obstructing the Jew's prayer near the Torah ark is a fragmentary version of more developed iconographic schemes conveying the idea of human prayer ascending to the divine seat through the heavenly gates. Such a composite image is painted above the text of an additional prayer for the first day of Rosh ha-Shanah in a late-thirteenth-century German prayer book for the High Holidays and Feast of Tabernacles (fig. 13).⁴¹ A dragon located opposite the Jew blowing a *shofar* has pointed ears and wings, and stands on its coiled tail. This dragon swallows a green sprout that grows from the left base of an arcade, and a lion bites the sprout rooted in the base of the arcade's right support. The golden arcade represents the heavenly gates towards which the Jew directs his prayer. A small open hand appearing in the

39 Eleazar Rokeah, *Perush ha-Rokeah*, 1:64.

40 Num. Rabbah 19:23 (Eleazar quoted this midrash in *Perush ha-Rokeah*, 3: 80). Cf. Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion*, 78, who used this commentary for a discussion of dragons in medieval rabbinical sources.

41 See a publication and a detailed description of this picture in Ariella Amar and Ruth Jacoby, *Ingathering of the Nations: Treasures of Jewish Art: Documenting an Endangered Legacy* (Jerusalem, 1998), 41.

middle arch just above the *shofar* is the Hand of God, a traditional sign of divine presence.⁴² In this scene, the hand also alludes to the mercy of God who “extends the right hand to receive repentant sinners.”⁴³ In the left arch a winged angel turns towards the center. The tripartite composition of this painting resembles the late-twelfth-century relief of the damned attempting to approach the gate of Paradise (fig. 14) within the gateway on the eastern façade of the Saint Trophime Cathedral in Arles: the arched heavenly gate through which God’s hand is seen occupies the center, the men turning to the gate and appealing for divine mercy are on the right side, and an angel appears on the left. Such a composite image perhaps suggested the general layout of images, but its contents would have been reworked by illuminators of Jewish manuscripts. As a result, an apocalyptic picture of the punished sinners who cannot enter the celestial gate was turned into an illustration of the mercy of God who forgives the penitent sinful on the Day of Atonement.

The angel extending his right hand (fig. 13) nearly copies the gesture of God’s hand. The word written next to the angel’s face in the prayer book states that he is a סניגור (sanegor, Heb., advocate). This is a popular epithet for angels in the rabbinical literature representing God’s judgment of the people of Israel during the High Holidays as a court trial. The midrash also states that the קטגור (kategor, Heb., accuser) opposing the advocating angel at the celestial trial is Satan.⁴⁴ In the painting, the word *kategor* is written under the middle arch, hinting at Satan who impedes the ascent of the prayer to Heaven. Visual portrayal of evil forces is given in the figures of the dragon and lion known to us from Psalm 91:13 as satanic



Fig. 14. Arles, Saint-Trophime Cathedral. *Angel and the Damned near the Gate of Paradise*, late 12th century, stone relief on the right side of the gateway on the western façade

symbols. Notably, the dragon imagery had its impact on the lion, whose turned head, vertical position, and location behind the worshipper are characteristic of dragons such as that in the prayer book from the Alliance Israélite Universelle (fig. 10). In contrast to the images of the satanic beasts being repressed, as mentioned in the psalm, the “vertical” dragons represent evil threatening the faithful even at the threshold of the heavenly gate.

These illuminations of prayers for God’s mercy during the High Holidays use the dragon as a symbol of evil in the context of worship in the synagogue. Archaeological discoveries from the medieval synagogue in Worms suggest that after the dragon imagery was developed in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, sculpted dragons were again accepted in a synagogue. Since its establishment in 1174–75, the synagogue in Worms was renovated on numerous occasions until its almost complete destruction in World War II, and then rebuilt from ruins in the late 1950s.⁴⁵ Two broken dragon reliefs detached from their

42 André Grabar, “Recherches sur les sources juives de l’art paléochrétien: La main de Dieu,” *Cahiers Archéologiques* 16 (1964): 245–48; Meir Bar-Ilan, “The Hand of God: A Chapter in Rabbinic Anthropomorphism,” in *Rashi 1040–1990: Hommage à Ephraïm E. Urbach, Congrès européen des études juives*, ed. Gabrielle Sed-Rajna (Paris, 1993), 321–35.

43 Sifri Deut. 30:29; Lament. Rabbah (S. Buber edition) 5:5; Midrash Tanhuma (Warsaw edition): *Mishpatim* 19; *Yalkut Shim’oni*, sign 823; *Maḥzor Vitry*, sign 93.

44 The Greek words συνήγορος and κατήγορος were adopted as legal terms in Mishnaic Hebrew. The angels are presented as intermediaries bringing the prayers of people before God’s throne in the Apocrypha

(Tobit 3:16; 12:12, 15) and Pseudepigrapha (Testament of Twelve Patriarchs: Levi 4, Dan 6; 1 Enoch 9:2, 4; 15:2). For an example of the midrashic discourse on angels defending the People of Israel vs. Satan the accuser at God’s trial, see Exod. Rabbah (Vilna edition), 18:5. The Jews of medieval Germany and France knew well this epithet of Satan from the synagogue liturgy: see, e. g., *Maḥzor Vitry*, signs 338, 347. This *maḥzor*, compiled by Simḥah ben Samuel of Vitry before 1105 on the basis of the decisions and customs of Rashi, observed contemporary customs and became the basis of the Ashkenazi rite (Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and Its Development* [New York, 1967], 60).

45 Otto Böcher, “Die Alte Synagoge zu Worms,” in *Die Alte Synagoge zu Worms*, ed. Ernst Róth (Frankfurt on the Main, 1961), 11–154.

Fig. 15. Worms, Synagogue. Relief of a dragon on a fragment of a stone arch, 1355(?). Worms, Stadtarchiv (Photo: Ilia Rodov)

Fig. 16. Worms, Synagogue. Rosette and Hebrew inscriptions, 1623/24, (marked by arrows) on obverse of the fragment of a stone arch in fig. 15. Worms, Stadtarchiv (Photo: Ilia Rodov)



original site (figs. 15–17) were discovered in the course of the excavations that preceded the rebuilding. The rear part of one dragon is found on the right spandrel of an arch (fig. 15) of the Torah ark.⁴⁶ In German art, the earliest dragons similarly striding on the rounded side of spandrels are dated from the Romanesque period. For instance, such dragons decorate the towers symbolizing the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem in the eleventh-century monumental circular lamp from Hildesheim Cathedral (figs. 19–21).⁴⁷ The model for the dragon relief in the synagogue might have been found in Hebrew

manuscripts. The bird's talons and the sharpened wing feathers of the striding dragon in the Worms *Maḥzor* (fig. 8) resemble the dragon from the Worms synagogue (fig. 15),⁴⁸ while the latter's pose is almost a copy of the dragon striding on the arch above the rotatable Hebrew calendar in the Sephardi Bible from ca. 1300 (fig. 22).⁴⁹ The style of the relief thus suggests that it most likely originated in the great reconstruction of the synagogue in 1355.⁵⁰

Another dragon in the Worms synagogue is known from a photograph taken in situ during the excavations of 1953 (fig. 17).⁵¹ The most convincing position of the

46 The surviving fragment is 34 cm wide, 43 cm high, and approximately 14 cm in depth, i. e., it is about a third of the arch opening that could have enclosed the meter-wide niche of the ark. On the analysis and attribution of this fragment as a remnant of the ark's arch, see Böcher, "Die Alte Synagoge," 73 n. 328, no. 10.

47 Willmuth Arenhövel, *Der Hezilo-Radleuchter im Dom zu Hildesheim: Beiträge zur Hildesheimer Kunst des 11. Jahrhunderts unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Ornamentik* (Berlin, 1975).

48 This manuscript was produced in Würzburg by Jewish craftsmen Simḥah ha-Sofer ("the scribe"), son of Judah the scribe of Nuremberg, and Shema'ayah ha-Zarfati ("the Frenchman"), who may have been the artist. The name of Worms was given to the *Maḥzor* only after the Jewish community of Würzburg was destroyed in 1298 and refugees brought the manuscript to Worms, where it was kept in the Old Synagogue from 1578 to 1938 (Malachi Beit-Arié, "The Worms *Maḥzor*: Its History and Its Palaeographic and Codicological Characteristics," and Bezalel Narkiss and Aliza Cohen-Mushlin, "The Illumination of the Worms *Maḥzor*," in *Worms Maḥzor: Ms. Jewish*

National and University Library, Heb. 4^o 781/1, the complete facsimile, ed. Malachi Beit-Arié, [Vaduz, 1985], Introductory volume, 13–35 and 79–89 respectively).

49 Bible, Toledo, ca. 1300. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. hébr. 20, fol. 7v. See Sed-Rajna and Fellous, *Les manuscrits Hébreux enluminés* (n. 34 above), 38.

50 On this reconstruction, see Böcher, "Die Alte Synagoge," 57–58, 73.

51 Worms, Stadtarchiv, negative no. M 6966. According to the numeration and the caption of this photograph, it belongs to the series of photographs of the stone fragments discovered in the ground of the synagogue of Worms that were taken on April 16, 1953. However, this fragment is absent in Böcher's list of the surviving carved stones (Böcher, "Die Alte Synagoge," 73–74 nn. 328–328a), and I could not find it in Worms. For these reasons, its measurements are unknown and it is not clear whether or how its other sides were decorated or what was the function of the recession with two bosses in the shadowed section under the dragon's legs.



Fig. 17. Worms, Synagogue. Relief of a dragon on a fragment of a stone arch, 1355 (?). Photo: 1953. Worms, Stadtarchiv, negative no. M 6966. Courtesy of Stadtarchiv Worms

fragment is when the dragon is set on a light diagonal with its head at the bottom left. Consequently, the dragon appears at the bottom of a shallow panel, the left border of which slightly inclines or curves inwards. There is a groove with bosses on the bottom of the block below the frame, and a fragment of a projection from this area is seen at the bottom right. The rounded section with an angular outgrowth protruding on the right above this fragment may be a remnant of a trefoil arch. A reconstruction of such an arch along with the dragon fragment is possible using remnants of a trefoil arch found during the 1957 excavations in this synagogue⁵² and comparable architectonic depictions of arches decorated with zoomorphic monsters in the Worms *Maḥzor*.⁵³ The result will resemble the lower left section of an arch with a lintel between impostes such as that in the portal on fol. 151r of this manuscript, also decorated with a dragon in just this area (fig. 18). The bosses on the carved fragment recall the flowers on the lintel of another such portal on fol. 39v in the *Maḥzor*. However, the trefoil arch makes it clear that this is a Gothic structure. Probably, the arch was a part of the *bimah*'s

52 Worms, Stadtarchiv, negative no. M 10017.

53 The portals depicted in the Worms *Maḥzor*, I (Worms *Maḥzor*, the complete facsimile, fols. 39v, 86v, and 151r) demonstrate a combination of Romanesque structure and contemporary Gothic features such as that

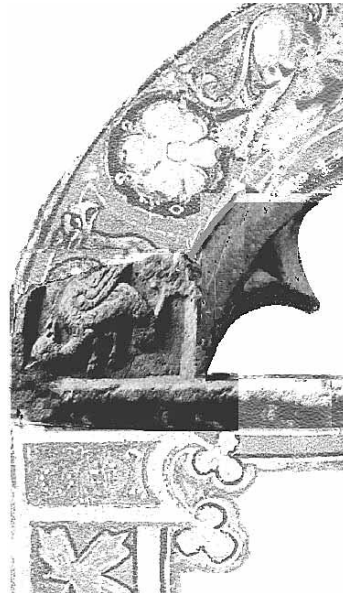


Fig. 18. Reconstruction of an arch with a dragon, based on fig. 17 and on a detail of the portal depicted in Worms *Maḥzor*, vol. 1, Germany (Würzburg?), 1272. Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library, Heb. 4^o 781/1, fol. 151r

Gothic enclosure until it was reconstructed in 1623–24.⁵⁴

The second dragon is depicted with a long tongue protruding from its open mouth, a small “horned” head on a neck growing from its belly, two birdlike legs, wings, and a coiled tail ending in a wide tassel. A similar dragon with a coiled tail, wings, more clearly birdlike legs, and a neck growing from its belly is found in the thirteenth-century Hebrew Bible (fig. 22, on the upper left), and dragons with sharpened muzzles and ears, protruding tongues, and a wide leaf at the end of the tail appear, for instance, on folio 202v in the Double *Maḥzor* from ca. 1290 (fig. 9). The picturesque outline and free placement of the dragon within the frame are also in accord with the Gothic style of the second half of the thirteenth century (e.g., fig. 8). Such dragons from thirteenth-century Hebrew illuminated manuscripts clearly parallel the dragon reliefs found in the synagogue.

If our assumptions are correct, both dragon reliefs were once situated in spandrels: one dragon moves towards the apex of the arch of the Torah ark (fig. 15), while the other faced down away from the arch of the *bimah* (figs. 17–18). The compositional arrangements

of the obsolete style of stone carvings from 1355 in the Worms synagogue.
54 On the Gothic *bimah*'s enclosure, see Böcher, “Die Alte Synagoge,” 79ff.; Walter Cahn, “The *Bimah* of the Worms Synagogue Reconsidered,” *Jewish Art* 12–13 (1986–87): 266–68.

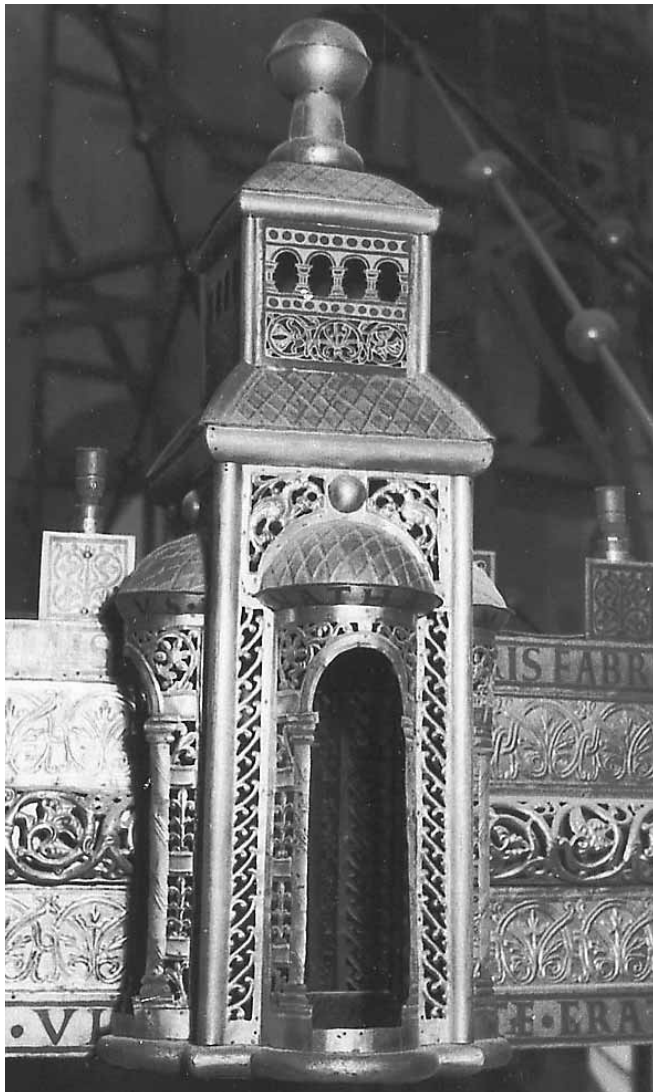


Fig. 19. Hildesheim, Cathedral. *Gate of Heavenly Jerusalem* with dragons in the spandrels above the entrance, detail of the monumental circular lamp, 11th century



Fig. 20. Hildesheim, Cathedral. Wingless dragon biting a plant above a *Gate of Heavenly Jerusalem*, detail of the monumental circular lamp, 11th century



Fig. 21. Hildesheim, Cathedral. Winged dragon above a *Gate of Heavenly Jerusalem*, detail of the monumental circular lamp, 11th century

differentiate between the passive dragon with drooping legs that seems to be falling, escaping, or being ejected, and an active image of a steadily striding dragon. This difference well corresponds to the distinction between the repressed dragons and the aggressive ones in illuminated manuscripts. The retreating dragon from the

synagogue (fig. 17) might give visual expression to the belief that the power of the Torah repels satanic forces. Thus the image could have been placed on the enclosure of the *bimah* where the Torah is read.⁵⁵

The location of a fragment of the differently rendered dragon on the right part of the arch (fig. 15) suggests

55 The concept of the Torah preventing the entrance of evil spirits is used in the *mezuzah*, a container with a piece of parchment inscribed with the biblical passages Deut. 6:4–9 and 11:13–21. Jews affix the *mezuzah* to the doorframes of houses and synagogues in accordance with the verses “on the doorposts of thy house and within thy gates”

(Deut. 11:20). A protective power in warding off evil spirits was attributed to the *mezuzah* from Talmudic times on (see, e.g., BT *Menaḥot* 33b, *Gen. Rabbah* 35). See also Victor Aptowitz, “Les noms de Dieu et des anges dans la mezouza: Contributions à l’histoire de la mystique et de la cabbale,” *Revue des études juives* 60 (1910): 39–52.

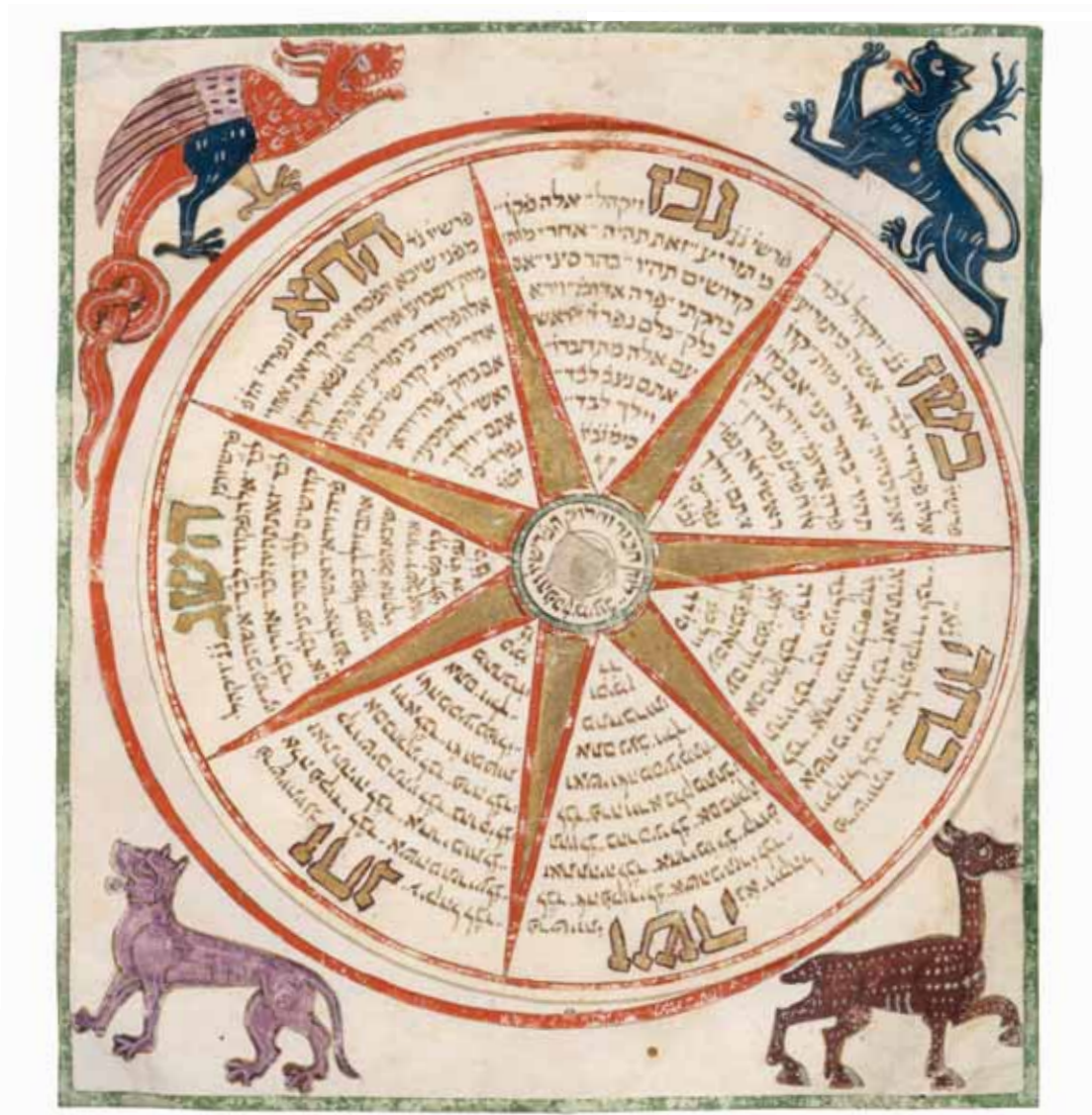


Fig. 22. Rotatable calendar, Bible, Toledo, Navarre, ca. 1300. Paris, BN, MS. hébr. 20, fol. 7v. Cliché Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

that the whole composition consisted of two images facing each other. Otto Böcher supposed that there were two dragons on the arch of the synagogue ark, as above the gates in the lamp from Hildesheim (fig. 19),⁵⁶ but it is still possible that the dragon opposed some other animal, probably a lion, as was usual in medieval iconography. For instance, a dragon with coiled tail and a lion are set

⁵⁶ Böcher (“Die Alte Synagoge,” 74 n. 328, nos. 33–34, fig. 44) reported on two other fragments belonging to the same arch, one of which was a remnant of the left spandrel with a dragon’s tail, but neither their current location nor the existence of any photographs of them are known.

above the arch of the western portal from the 1230s or 1240s of the St. Jacob Church in Coesfeld in North Rhine-Westphalia (fig. 23). The satanic beasts approach the door of the church which, according to the inscription on the portal’s lintel, was associated with “the house of God, and [...] the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:17).⁵⁷ The circular lamp from the Hildesheim

⁵⁷ See also Carola Jaggi and Hans-Rudolf Meier, “Lowe, Drache, Ritter und Madonna: Zur Ikonographie der Schöntaler Fassadenskulptur,” *Unsere Kunstdenkmäler* 40, no. 4 (1989): 412–19.



Fig. 23. Coesfeld, Saint Jacob Church. Dragon and lion on the arch enclosing a sculpture of Mary and the Child and the inscription *Hic domus Dei est et porta coeli* (Gen. 28:17), 1230s–1240s, stone and wood carvings in the western portal

Cathedral exemplifies the same meaning of the dragons above the heavenly gate. The lamp represents the walls and tower gates of the heavenly Jerusalem (fig. 19), and the dragons allude to the satanic powers that reach up to the gates, but cannot enter the heavenly Jerusalem.

Whatever was the dragon's counterpart on the arch from the Worms synagogue, the arch with this dragon was placed on the ark, the focus of worship and a metaphor of the heavenly gate for prayers. This location of the dragon relates to the archetypal motif of monsters approaching the sacred object known to us from church reliefs of dragons, or of a dragon and a lion flanking the Tree of Life (figs. 6–7).⁵⁸ Some of the striding dragons

symmetrically set in spandrels above entrances into the towers on the Hildesheim lamp have closed wings and bite a fruitful plant symbolizing Christianity (e.g., fig. 20).⁵⁹ A Jewish reinterpretation of this motif is the dragon and lion biting the green “roots” of the gates of heaven in the German prayer book for the High Holidays (fig. 13). The presence of evil at the heavenly gate, in proximity to the divine throne, obviously occupied the mind of the illustrator of the Wrocław volume in the German Double *Maḥzor* from ca. 1290. On folio 89v (fig. 24), he depicted two pairs of satanic beasts: a dragon with a lion and a pair of dragons. The dragon and lion clutching the word “gates” are located in a blue panel across the gateway. This portal serves as a frame for the text of the morning prayer on the Day of Atonement, which blesses “the Lord our God, King of the Universe, who opens the gates of mercy.”⁶⁰ The dragon and lion look as if they are trying to block the gate and prevent the passage of prayers to Heaven. The creatures carrying God's Throne of Glory (Ezek. 10:14) in the four medallions substitute for the capitals and bases of the columns, and the medallion at the top of the arch contains an empty chair, apparently the eschatological throne of the King of the Universe.⁶¹ A pair of dragons situated within the arch raise their heads toward the throne, playing the role of God's adversary reaching the divine throne.⁶² Dragons on the synagogue ark, a symbolic substitute for the Ark of the Covenant that

58 Note also the vine containing animal heads that appears between the beasts on the chancel screen from Pavia (fig. 6). It is probably also copied from oriental models (799 – *Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit: Katalog der Ausstellung, Paderborn, 1999*, 1 [Mainz, 1999]: 81). Scholars assume that in the context of Christian art, such trees represented the Tree of Life as a symbol of the Cross, Eucharist, and Redemption (Schiller, *Iconographie der christlichen Kunst* [n. 24 above], 3:182).

59 On this arboreal symbolism, see Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, vol. 2 (London, 1972), 133–36; Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Mediaeval Art* (New York, 1964), 65–66; Schiller, *Iconographie der christlichen Kunst*, 4, part 1:67–68; Jennifer O'Reilly, *Studies in the Iconography of the Virtues and Vices in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1988), 334–36; Andreina Contessa, “‘Arbor Bona’: Dalla menorah alla Vergine: la metafora arborea, segno della redenzione,” *Cahiers Ratisbonne* 1 (1996): 67–71.

60 Note the verse “Our Father, our King, open the gates of heaven unto our prayer” from the *Avinu malkenu* prayer on the Day of Atonement.

The belief that the heavenly gates of repentance always remain open for one's prayer is expressed in *Pesikta* 25:157b.

61 Wrocław, University Library, Cod. Or. I, 1, fol. 89v (Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *Le Maḥzor enluminé* [Leiden, 1983], 67–68). Rachel Wischnitzer, “The Messianic Fox” (n. 35 above), 74 associated this throne with “thrones” in Daniel 7:9 and their interpretation in *Ḥagigah* 14a as one throne kept for God and one for the Messiah of the House of David. Discussing the messianic symbolism of a fox depicted between the lion and the dragon, she supposed that the only chair in the picture is prepared for the Messiah. However, the prayer containing the plea for ascendance of the voices of penitence through the Gate of Mercy to God and the carriers of God's throne depicted in the other medallions suggest that this empty chair is rather that reserved for God.

62 On the Biblical concept of Satan as God's adversary, see Rivkah Scharf Kluger, *Satan in the Old Testament* (Evanston, 1967); Peggy Lynne Day, *An Adversary in Heaven: “Satan” in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta, 1988).



Fig. 24. Gate of Mercy, Double Mahzor, vol. 2, Esslingen (?), ca. 1290. Wrocław, University Library, Cod. Or. I, 1, fol. 89v

corresponds to the celestial divine throne,⁶³ delineated a similar idea of evil unceasingly challenging God's almighty power.

It would seem that during the reconstruction of 1623–24 following the devastation of the Worms synagogue in 1615, the arch with the dragon relief (fig. 16) had been turned around and the rear part was decorated with a large open flower (fig. 17). This would explain why the two opposite faces of the same arch wall were decorated in different periods, although only one of them would be exposed while the other would face the wall of the Torah niche.⁶⁴ As the *bimah's* enclosure was also rebuilt at that time,⁶⁵ the other arch with the dragon (fig. 17) might have easily been set aside. The objection to zoomorphic images after a long period of their use in the synagogue was stimulated by the growth of iconophobia in the surrounding society. The severe attitude to images in a place of worship could be inspired by the Protestantism that had deep roots in the city. After Martin Luther (1483–1546) was summoned before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in 1521, and in spite of the fact that he was condemned there, in 1525 the people of Worms adopted Luther's teachings. During the renovation of the synagogue in 1623–24, the period of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), the city was a Protestant stronghold. Luther's polemic against worshipping images as idolatry,

in particular his statements that the biblical Israelites had abolished idols, and the austere Protestant practices of church decoration⁶⁶ might have reinforced the fear of the Jews that zoomorphic images, especially those appearing on the Torah ark, could seem to be idols. As a result, the dragon reliefs were replaced by a more neutral design.

Yet, after the dragon reliefs were removed from visible locations in the Worms synagogue, and after dragons, except for those depicted as slain by St. George or St. Michael, became infrequent in church art,⁶⁷ dragon images reappeared in eastern European synagogues. The contacts between the Ashkenazi communities of the West and East were stable and profound not only because of the historical origins of most eastern European Jews in Germany and Bohemia, but also as a result of manifold spiritual, economical, and family connections.⁶⁸ Illuminated manuscripts brought by immigrants to eastern Europe contributed to the continuity of the Jewish artistic tradition. Thus the rich and picturesque art of synagogue decorations that flourished in eastern European synagogues since the seventeenth century adopted images from medieval Hebrew illuminated manuscripts.⁶⁹

It is likely that medieval images served as a model for a pair of dragons on the doors of the Torah ark in the High Synagogue in Kazimierz near Cracow (fig. 25). The

63 E.g., see Midrash Tanḥuma, *Vayakhel* 7 (Vilna ed.).

64 Böcher, "Die Alte Synagoge," 119 no. XIII. Böcher mistakenly dated the supposed relief of two heraldic dragons above the ark in the Worms synagogue to the 1623–24 reconstruction. He believed that they were inspired by the story of the dragon from Worms and by the town's coat-of-arms, several sixteenth-century versions of which contained a pair of dragons (*ibid.*, 76–77). In fact, the sculptural treatment of the rosette on the opposite side of the arch (fig. 16) resembles that of the petaled rosettes on the arched portal leading into the Rashi chamber from 1623–24 in the Worms synagogue. This last example has its parallel in contemporary architectonic decoration in Worms: for instance, two concentric flowers resembling those in the synagogue are seen above the portal of 1610 of the Stifstkeller on Stelzen Street.

65 See n. 54 above.

66 Sergiusz Michalski, *Protestanci a sztuka: Spór o obrazy w Europie Nowożytnej* (Warsaw, 1989), *passim* (Polish). This book gives more details than its English edition, Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London, 1993).

67 Medieval dragons very seldom appeared in Renaissance allegorical compositions and applied art; see, e.g., Heinz Stafski, "Der Drachenleuchter für Anton Tücher: Ein angezweifertes Werk des Veit Stoß," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 49, no. 2 (1986): 125–46.

68 Bernard D. Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100 to 1800* (Philadelphia, 1973), 22–29; Jerzy Wyrozumski, "Jews in Medieval Poland," in *The Jews in Old Poland*, eds. Antony Polonsky, Jakub Basista, and Andrzej Link-Lenczowski (London, 1993), 13–22; Alexander Gieysztor, "The Beginnings of Jewish Settlement in the Polish Land," in *The Jews in Poland*, eds. Chimen Abramsky, Maciej Jachimczyk, and Antony Polonsky (Oxford, 1986), 5–21; Jacob Elbaum, *Petihut ve-histagrut: ha-yezirah ha-ruḥanit-ha-sifrutit be-Polin u-ve-arzot Ashkenaz be-shilhei ha-meah ha-shesh-esreh* (Openness and Insularity: Late Sixteenth-century Jewish Literature in Poland and Ashkenaz) (Jerusalem, 1990) (Hebrew).

69 See David Davidovich, *Ziyurei kir be-vatei-keneset be-Polin* (Mural Paintings in Synagogues in Poland) (Jerusalem, 1968) (Hebrew); Huberman, *Living Symbols*; Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion*; Hubka, *Resplendent Synagogue* (all in n. 1 above).



Fig. 25. Cracow (Kazimierz), High Synagogue. *Crowned Eagle with Shofars, Dragons, Birds and the Four Species*, wooden reliefs (1773?) on outer side of the doors (second half of the 17th century) of the Torah ark (1556–63) (Majer Bałaban, *Historja Żydów w Krakowie i na Kazimierzu*, 1 [Cracow, 1931]: fig. 20)

dragons are situated under an eagle with *shofars* in its claws, together with birds, plants, and fruits. The carved wood figures were attached to the rhomboid grids on the outer side of the doors. Low metal cast reliefs representing the seven-branched menorah, the table of the shewbread, a dedicatory inscription, and an artist's signature dated to the second half of the seventeenth century decorated the inner side of these doors.⁷⁰ The wooden reliefs were probably added to the outer side of the doors following the renovation of the Torah ark after a fire broke out in 1773 in the house adjoining the synagogue on the east.⁷¹

In the synagogue art of eastern Europe from the late seventeenth century on, a great crowned eagle symbolized the divine presence. This meaning was inspired by the biblical metaphor of God's protection of the people of Israel in the form of an eagle bearing its young on the wings.⁷² A closer examination of the dragons catching the eagle's *shofars* reinforces the resemblance of the dragons from the High Synagogue and medieval dragon

iconography. Like medieval pictures of Jews blowing a *shofar* (figs. 10–11, 13), this relief hints at the belief that the sound of a *shofar* repels the satanic dragons from the Torah ark. The dragons placed in a vertical position have their prototype in Romanesque art (fig. 12) and in medieval Hebrew manuscripts (fig. 10). Like medieval dragons (figs. 9, 13, 20), the two from the eighteenth century not only approach a sacred object, but also bite it: an anonymous carver from Cracow delicately sculpted small teeth seen in the dragons' open mouths which touch the *shofars*.

In contrast to the *shofars* in the hands of praying Jews (e.g., figs. 10–11, 13), the *shofars* of the great eagle are divine attributes rather than an implement of human prayer. The *shofar* alluded to the trumpet sounds as a proclamation of the sovereignty of God and a reminder of the Torah. The *shofar* also serves as a sign of the Messiah who will use it to summon the scattered people of Israel to return to the Holy Land, and a symbol of the messianic restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem and of

70 The doors disappeared during World War II. The reliefs on both sides of the doors are seen in photographs of the Torah ark published in Majer Bałaban, *Zabytki Historyczne Żydów w Polsce* (Historical Monuments of Jews in Poland) (Warsaw, 1929), 77, plate VII, figs. 19–20 (Polish); idem, *Historja Żydów w Krakowie i na Kazimierzu, 1304–1868* (The History of Jews in Cracow and Kazimierz) (Cracow, 1931), 1:412, figs. 20 (facing p. 305), 21 (facing p. 321) (Polish); idem, *Przewodnik po Żydowskich zabytkach Krakowa* (A Guide to the Jewish Monuments of Cracow) (Cracow, 1935), 37 (Polish). See also Iris Fishof, "Zug daltot aron kodesh mi-Krakov" (A Pair of Torah Ark Doors from Cracow), in *Kroke – Kazimierz – Krakov: mehkarim be-toldot yehudei Krakov* (Kroke-Kazimierz-Cracow: Studies in the History of Cracow Jewry), ed. Elchanan Reiner (Tel Aviv, 2001), 294–96 (Hebrew).

71 The dating of the wooden reliefs is based on their artistic rendering. They resemble the picturesque zoomorphic images executed in low stucco relief that became popular in Polish synagogues in the second half of the eighteenth century. Earliest dated reliefs of this kind have survived in the synagogue of Łańcut from 1761, see Wischnitzer, *Architecture* (n.1 above), 116–18; Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe* (n. 10 above), 209–211; Yom-Tov Assis and Neil Folberg, *And I Shall Dwell among Them* (n. p.), 132–33; *Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce* (new series) 3, *Województwo Rzeszowskie: Łańcut i okolice*, 5 [1] (Catalogue of the Monuments of Art in Poland. The Rzeszów District: Łańcut and Its Vicinities), eds. Małgorzata Omilanowska and Jakub Sito (Warsaw, 1995), 11–14 (Polish); Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka, *Bramy Nieba: Bóżnice murowane na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* (The Gates of Heaven: Masonry Synagogues in the Lands of the

Former Polish Commonwealth) (Warsaw, 1999), 332–35 (Polish). On the repairs in the High Synagogue in 1773, see Bałaban, *Przewodnik*, 40; Bogusław Krasnowolski, *Ulice i place Krakowskiego Kazimierza: Z dziejów chrześcijan i żydów w Polsce* (Streets and Squares of Kazimierz in Cracow: From the History of the Christians and Jews in Poland) (Cracow, 1992), 74 (Polish); *Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce*, 4, *Miasto Kraków*, 6, *Kazimierz i Stradom. Judaica: Bóżnice, budowle publiczne i cmentarze* (Catalogue of the Monuments of Art in Poland: The Town of Cracow, Kazimierz and Stradom, Judaica: Synagogues, Public Buildings, and Cemeteries), eds. Izabella Rejduch-Samkowa and Jan Samek (Warsaw, 1995), 16 (Polish).

72 Exod. 19:4; Deut. 32:11. On the motif of the eagle in the art of Ashkenazi synagogues, see Ida Huberman, "Tikrot mezuyarot be-vattei-keneset me-ez be-drom-mizrah Polin" (Painted Ceilings in Wooden Synagogues in South-eastern Poland) (M.A. thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1979), 54–57 (Hebrew); idem, *Living Symbols*, 55–57; Boris Khaimovich, "'Gerald'cheskiy' oryol v khudozhestvennoy kul'ture vostochnoevropeyskikh evreev" (The Heraldic Eagle in the Artistic Culture of East-European Jews) *Vestnik evreyskogo universiteta* 3[21] (2000): 87–110 (Russian); idem, "The Jewish Bestiary of the 18th Century in the Dome Mural of the Khodorow Synagogue," *Jews and Slavs* 7 (2000): 133–38; Bracha Yaniv, "Motiv sheloshet haketarim be-aronot kodesh shel mizrah Eiropah," *Kenishta: Studies of the Synagogue World* 2 (2002): 78 (Hebrew section); Ilia Rodov, "The Eagle, Its Twin Heads and Many Faces: Synagogue Chandeliers Surmounted by Double-Headed Eagles," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 37 (2005): [in press].

the resurrection.⁷³ The messianic connotations of the image are developed by the plants bound together and baskets of fruit under the eagle: they depict the four species used for benedictions during the Feast of Tabernacles. Since antiquity these species have played a role as eschatological symbols.⁷⁴ Thus the dragons biting the *shofars* directly challenge divine power.

A different type of dragon image was developed in the second quarter of the eighteenth century by Jewish folk artist Hayim ben Isaac Segal of Slutsk, whose works are known to us from photographs, copies, and descriptions. In 1914 Rachel Wischnitzer published a monochromic photograph of a painting of the dragon under the walls of the city inscribed in Yiddish ווירמס (virms, i. e., Worms) from Hayim ben Isaac Segal's ceiling painting in the synagogue of Kopy in White Russia.⁷⁵ An almost identical fragment of the painting from 1740 on the northern section of the ceiling in the so-called "Cold" wooden synagogue in Mogilev on the Dnieper,⁷⁶ about 100 km. north of Kopy, is known to us in two copies. The first is Eliezer Lissitzky's color drawing (fig. 26), a reproduction of which was published in 1923 in the *Rimmon-Milgroim* journal as an illustration of the artist's



Fig. 26. El (Eliezer) Lissitzky (1890–1941), *Dragon under the Walls of Worms*, ca. 1916, copy of a fragment of Hayim ben Isaac Segal's ceiling painting (1740) in the synagogue in Mogilev on the Dnieper (*Milgroim* 3 [1923]: 8)

notes on his visit to the synagogue ca. 1916.⁷⁷ The other copy, a work of an anonymous student of the Vitebsk Art School from 1926, has survived only in a black-and-white photograph.⁷⁸

73 Traditional symbolic views on sounding the *shofar* were summarized by Rabbi Sa'adiah ben Joseph Gaon (882–942) in the "ten reasons," which stated that the *shofar* proclaims the sovereignty of God because of a custom to sound it at a coronation (the first reason); the *shofar* reminds one to be faithful to the teachings of the Torah, since it was heard at the giving of the Torah (the third reason); "to the sound of trumpets the Temple fell, and to the sound of trumpets it will be restored" (the fifth reason); the *shofar* is the symbol of the gathering of the nation in the Holy Land (the ninth reason); and it is "a reminder of the day of resurrection, the return to life" (the tenth reason). These principles are known from a fourteenth-century quotation by David ben Joseph Abudarham (*Perush ha-berakhot ve-ha-tefilot Abudarham ha-shalem* [Abudarham's Complete Interpretations of the Blessings and Prayer] [Jerusalem, 1959], 269–70 [Hebrew]), whose treatise was first printed in Lisbon in 1490 and has since been republished frequently.

74 See Rachel Wischnitzer, "Die messianische Hütte in der jüdischen Kunst," in idem, *From Dura to Rembrandt*, 55–63; Archer St. Clair, "God's House of Peace in Paradise: The Feast of Tabernacles on a Jewish Gold Glass," *Journal of Jewish Art* 11 (1985): 6–15; Elisabeth Revel-Neher, "L'alliance et la promesse: le symbolisme d'Eretz-Israel dans l'iconographie juive du Moyen Age," *Jewish Art* 12–13 (1986–87): 135–146; Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art* (n. 16 above), 347–78; Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, "Images of the Tabernacle/ Temple in Late Antique and Medieval Art: The State of Research," in *The Real*

and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art [=Jewish Art 23–24 (1997–98)]: 42–53. I thank Prof. Elisabeth Revel-Neher for her helpful suggestions and encouragement of my research.

75 Rachel Wischnitzer, "Iskusstvo u evreev v Pol'she i na Litve" (Art of the Jews in Poland and Lithuania), in *Istoriya evreyskogo naroda: Istoriya evreev v Rossii* (History of the Jewish People: History of Jews in Russia) (Moscow, 1914), 1:393–94 (Russian). The wooden synagogue in Kopy was burnt down at the beginning of World War I.

76 Polish *Mohylew*, Bielorussian, *Mahilyow*. The synagogue was destroyed in the 1930s.

77 Eliezer Lissitzky, "Al beit-ha-keneset be-Mohilev" (About the Synagogue in Mogilev), *Rimmon* 3 (1923): 8–12 (Hebrew), and in the identical Yiddish version "Vegn der mogilever shul," *Milgroim* 3 (1923): 8–13 (both journals were published in Berlin), translated into English by Seth L. Wolitz: El [Eliezer] Lissitzky, "Memoirs Concerning the Mohilev Synagogue," in *Tradition and Revolution: The Jewish Renaissance in Russian Avant-Garde Art, 1912–1928* [catalogue, Israel Museum], ed. Ruth Apter-Gabriel (Jerusalem, 1988), 233–34. On this drawing, see Ruth Apter-Gabriel, "El Lissitzky's Jewish Works," *ibid.*, 102, 225, cat. no. 1731.

78 Inessa Nikolaevna Slyun'kova, *Arkhitektura gorodov verkhnego pridneprov'ya XVII – serediny XIX v.* (The Architecture of the Towns in the Upper Dnieper Region from the Seventeenth to the Mid-Nineteenth Century) (Minsk, 1992), 30 (Russian). On the sketching of the painting of this synagogue by students of the Vitebsk Art

Eugen Kranzbühler, who came across Lissitzky's drawing in *Rimmon-Milgroim*, convincingly related the images of the dragon and Worms to the legend about the dragon threatening the people of Worms in Juspa the Shammes' *Ma'aseh nissim*.⁷⁹ This might have been known to Hayim Segal from either the Frankfurt-on-the-Oder Hebrew edition of Juspa's book in 1702, its Yiddish translation published in Amsterdam in 1723 and in Homburg in 1725,⁸⁰ or from hearsay. Wischnitzer revealed an even deeper influence of Juspa's book on the composition of ceiling paintings in the Mogilev synagogue. She interpreted the view of Worms and a similar view of Jerusalem on the opposite, southern, section of the ceiling and the sailboats depicted near these towns as an illustration of the legend about Jewish sages from Worms who declined a proposal to return to Jerusalem after seventy years of the Babylonian exile. The sages explained that they were happy enough in Worms, which they called "lesser Jerusalem." In other words, they preferred their well-being in exile to spiritual obligations toward the Holy Land. Juspa concluded that the persecutions which the Jews of Worms suffered afterwards came as chastisement for their objection to return to the Promised Land.⁸¹ Hayim Segal's terrible dragon with a red eye and a long arrow-like tongue is thus a personification of divine anger punishing the town.

It obviously was Juspa's description of the dragon as a legged "snake-like worm, only fatter and larger"⁸² rather than a visual model that influenced Hayim Segal's paintings of the dragon as a worm-like creature with short legs. But the picture is not a mere illustration of the text. The artist's adoption of the dragon tale is selective: whereas Juspa wrote about a smart locksmith who

outwitted the dragon, Segal placed the emphasis on the role of the satanic dragon as an accuser and punisher of the sinful.⁸³ This interpretation ignores the image of a hero, but continues conventions of the dragon imagery in medieval Jewish art.

The visual form and symbolic meaning of eighteenth-century dragons from synagogues in Cracow and Mogilev reinforce the approach which sees the surviving dragon images from medieval synagogues as testimony to a centuries-long evolution of zoomorphic allegory of evil in synagogue art. It thus appears that the dragon is one of the first images adopted from the art of the surrounding milieu in synagogues of the medieval Jewish communities of France and Germany. As in churches, dragons in synagogues were perceived in the light of Psalm 91:13 as a symbol of faith in evil-destroying divine power, whereas the true faith became associated with Judaism. The dragons in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts reflect a further evolution of the image from a symbol of defeated evil to a more dramatic concept of God's malevolent adversary attempting to obstruct the relationship between God and man. The message of the paintings is that devotion and faith will neutralize Satan, but evil will be finally destroyed only in the messianic age. The same topos can also be traced in synagogue art where dragons stood for the satanic powers threatening the faithful and punishing the sinful. The dragons on the synagogue ark became a visual manifestation of the belief in the mystical power of the divine presence expelling evil. After six centuries of the allegorical use of dragons, this imagery disappeared from the vocabulary of synagogue art, and its meaning was lost.

School, see Arkadii Zeltser, "Jewish Artists of Vitebsk in the Interwar Period: Between the National and Universal," *Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe* 50, no. 1 (2003): 105 n. 108.

79 See n. 27 above and also Kranzbühler, *Worms und Heldensage* (n. 27 above), 6, 109; Rachel Wischnitzer, "Kishutei beit-ha-keneset be-Mohilev al nehar Dnieper" (Decorations of the Synagogue in Mogilev on the River Dnieper), *He-avar* 15 (1968): 252 (Hebrew).

80 "Worms: Juspa Shammes," *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, 1925), 12:564–65.

81 Rachel Wischnitzer, "The Wise Men of Worms," *Reconstructionist* 25 no. 9 (15 June 1959): 10–12; idem, "Kishutei beit-ha-keneset be-Mohilev": 251–53.

82 Eidelberg, *R. Juspa* (n. 27 above), 83.

83 Juspa's tale is a version of the popular German legend relating that the dragon of Worms was slain by Siegfried. This legend appeared by the turn of the thirteenth century in the chapter "How Siegfried Came to Worms" of the Nibelung epos (*Das Nibelungenlied*, trans. from the Middle High German by Karl Simrock [Berlin, 1827], 3:104). See also Jakob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie* (Berlin, 1876), 2:537. On the legend of Siegfried as the origin for the toponym Worms, see also Hoffmann-Krayer and Bachtold-Staubli, *Handwörterbuch* (n. 12 above), 840–41 n. 5. On the archetypal folklore image of a hero defeating the dragon, see Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (n. 26 above), part 1, 2:163–70; part 3, *The Dying God* (London, 1930), 105–12.