

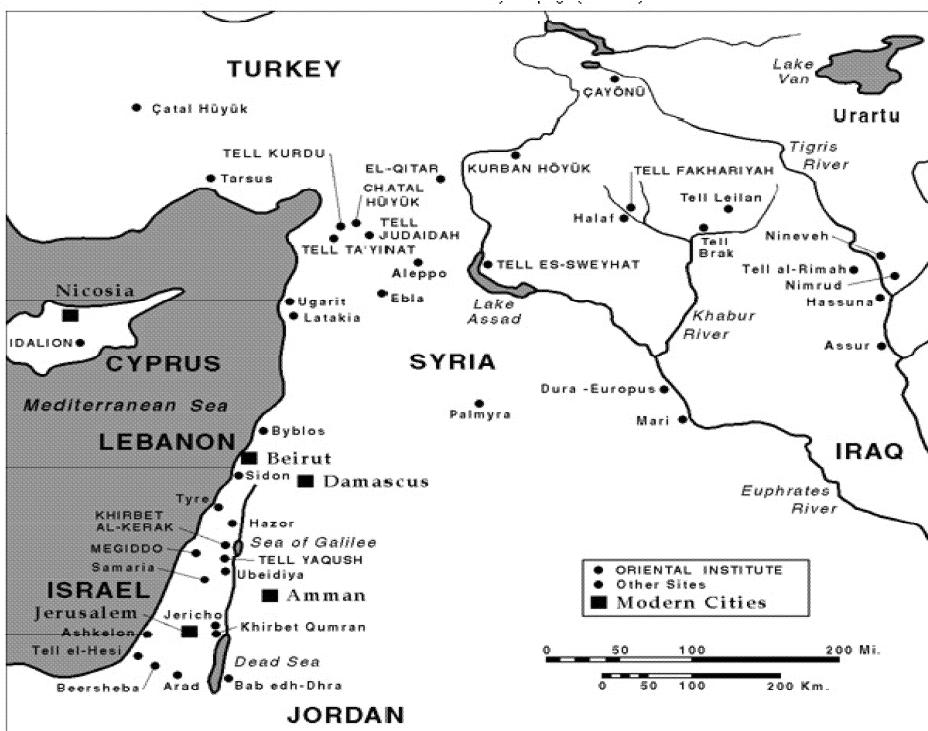
## ILLUSTRATED HAGGADOT

The first step to uncovering the history of illustrated **הגדות** is to ask a question: is there evidence of a genre of art that can be called “Jewish Art” that predates the 20th century? In other words, during the course of your visits to art museums, have you ever seen any art that you might describe as “Jewish Art” that predates the 20th century? In fact, can you name any Jewish artist whose paintings are known and who painted before the 20th century?

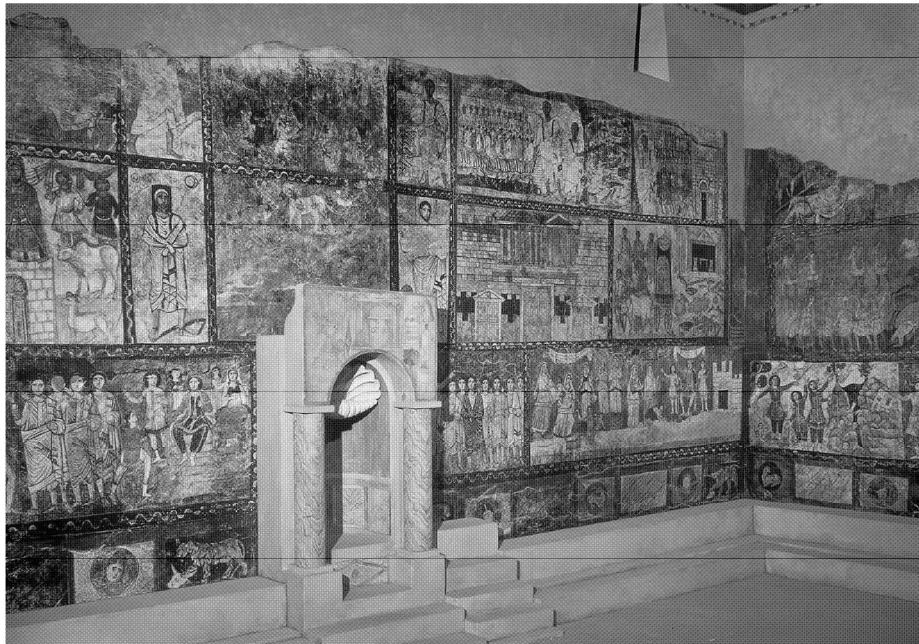
Illustrated **הגדות** clearly represent a form of “Jewish Art.” That they were produced raises more questions than they answer; what prompted the **הגדות** to be produced? Do they represent a period of “Jewish Art” and is there a history of “Jewish Art” that preceded their production?

Until the 1920’s art historians had difficulty answering those questions. The discovery of the synagogue at Dura Europos, Syria, significantly altered the art world’s perception of “Jewish Art”. The excavation of the site revealed a synagogue that stood in the early 200’s CE whose walls were covered with frescoes containing biblical scenes. The site was excavated by a team from Yale University and their work spanned the 1920’s and the 1930’s. The history of the excavation and photographs of what they found can be viewed at: [artgallery.yale.edu/duraeuropos](http://artgallery.yale.edu/duraeuropos).

Map showing location of Dura Europos



Archaeologists recognized that they uncovered a synagogue by the opening in the wall where the Torah was placed during the services:



A brief history of Dura Europos from [www.sacred-destinations.com/syria/dura-europos](http://www.sacred-destinations.com/syria/dura-europos):

Dura Europos was founded in 303 BC by the Seleucids (Alexander the Great's successors) on the intersection of an east-west trade route and a north-south trade route along the Euphrates. The new city, named for the birthplace of Seleucus I Nicator, controlled the river crossing on the route between Antioch on the Orontes and Seleucia on the Tigris. Dura Europos was part of a network of military colonies intended to secure Seleucid control of the Middle Euphrates.

Dura was rebuilt as a great Hellenistic city in the 2nd century BC, with a rectangular grid of streets arranged around a large central agora. Its location on a major crossroads made it a very cosmopolitan city: inscriptions in many languages have been found here and the religious buildings of pagans, Jews and Christians stand side by side.

Dura Europos later became a frontier fortress of the Parthian Empire and it was captured by the Romans in 165 AD. In the early 200s AD, the famed house-church and synagogue were built at Dura Europos. There was also a Mithraeum, a Temple of Bel and a Temple of Adonis in the multi-cultural city.

Dura Europos was abandoned after a Sassanian siege in 256-257. In a last-ditch attempt to save the city, the synagogue was filled in to make a fortress, thereby ensuring its preservation. The city eventually became covered in shifting sands and disappeared from sight.

Although the existence of Dura-Europos was long known through literary sources, it was not rediscovered until British troops under Captain Murphy made the first discovery during the Arab rebellion in the aftermath of World War I. On March 30, 1920, a soldier digging a trench uncovered beautifully preserved frescoes. The American archeologist James Henry Breasted, then at Baghdad, was alerted. Major excavations were carried out in the 1920s and 1930s by French and American teams.

The first excavations of the site, undertaken by Franz Cumont and published in 1922-23, identified the site as Dura-Europos and uncovered a temple before renewed hostilities in the area closed it to archaeology. Later, renewed campaigns directed by Michael Rostovtzeff funded by Yale University, continued until 1937, when funds ran out with only part of the excavations published. World War II then interfered.

A gap of about 1000 years separates the date when the frescoes at the synagogue at Dura Europos were painted and the period when illustrated **הגדות** were first created. Claire Moore in her book: *The Visual Dimension: Aspects of Jewish Art*, beginning on page 25, attempts to bridge the gap between the two periods:

The writings of Josephus Flavius may be helpful in discovering an approximate starting point for this antique Jewish art. Josephus wrote in about 100 C.E. for non-Jewish readers in Rome to whom he wished to explain the characteristics of his people. In *Bellum Judaicum* 2, 10:4, for example, he mentions that for the Jews any representation of God, man, or even an animal is forbidden. From his words it is clear that the prohibition was still strictly observed at the end of the first century C.E. Thus the appearance of a Jewish art can be pinpointed to within 100 years, for the models used at Dura Europos must necessarily have been drafted at the latest by about 200 C.E. This conclusion corresponds with the few Talmudic writings that deal with the question of images. The most important of these is the statement about Rabbi Johanan bar Nappaha (died 279) in J[erusalem] *Avodah Zarah* 3:3: "In the days of Rabbi Johanan bar Nappaha they began to illustrate the walls and he did not prevent it." The practice thus prevailed during his lifetime, and even this most respected Palestinian rabbi whose authority extended far beyond the borders of his own country was unable to stop it.

The only synagogue from antiquity whose decoration with narrative scenes has been preserved is Dura Europos, but an inscription in the Great Synagogue of Sardis proves that wall paintings also existed at one time in that synagogue. The synagogue was discovered in the 1960s, and this particular inscription probably dates back to the first half of the third century. The inscription clearly mentions zographia, the painting of figures. These probably adorned the ceiling, for the walls were covered with marble incrustations. A quotation from Rav Aha bar Jacob in *Yoma* 54a, which

dates from the beginning of the fourth century, also proves the common practice of decorating synagogue walls with figural paintings. It reads, "Doubtless there existed painted Cherubim in the second temple." Obviously Rav Acha could not have reached this conclusion had he himself not seen such paintings in the synagogues. Such figural representations were quite common in Palestine and the Diaspora up to the sixth century, as the mosaic floors in the synagogues of Gaza and Beth Alpha prove.

In spite of the fact that the widespread custom of decorating synagogues with scenes from the Old Testament or with representations of single biblical figures such as David or Moses had been quite common for more than 400 years, Jews at the end of the sixth century turned away sharply from this practice as a result of a new consciousness of their own cultural, national, and religious past. This development led not only to the abandonment of the Greek language by the Jews but also to their intensified opposition to figural representation. When the Jewish iconoclasts were joined in this struggle by followers of Islam in the seventh century and by Byzantium in the eighth, they found a general consent that allowed them to strengthen and support one another against any kind of representation. Middle Byzantine art, which originates in early Byzantine models, proves beyond doubt that this artistic tradition did not perish in spite of a persecution that lasted about 120 years. However, the interval between late-antique and medieval Jewish art lasted not merely 120 years but about 600 years.

Medieval Jewish art originated not in the East but in the West. The East, remaining under the rule of Islam, was opposed to any figural representation. However, one can assume that illustrated Jewish manuscripts existed in Franconia during the Antique period—that country having been a Jewish cultural metropolis from the time of the Merovingians. It is not at all surprising that the illustrated manuscripts have not been preserved, for we know that in the mid-thirteenth century, at the time of the great dispute between Christian theologians and Jewish scholars (from 1240 to 1248, to date it exactly), no less than 20,000 Jewish manuscripts were collected from throughout the country and brought to Paris in ox carts to be burned. We may assume that among them would have been a number of illustrated Hebrew manuscripts—a particular eyesore for the Christian inquisitors, for those fanatics not only fought any heterodoxy among their own people but in their disputes with the Jews also identified and persecuted every Jewish infringement of the revealed commandments. We know from one of the writings of the Jewish apologist Joseph ha-Mekanne (Joseph the Zealot) that the creation of images was one of those concerns. Joseph ha-Mekanne, who objected to such an attack on Jewish works of art, wrote, "They argue against the plastic representation of cherubim. R. Nathan, may his soul rest in peace, answered . . . that they were only prohibited from worshipping them. How could Solomon have made the lions if they had been

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prohibited." Joseph ha-Mekanne seems thus to justify the works of art that existed in his own time by referring to representations mentioned in the Old Testament and by pointing out clearly that those representations had not infringed the Jewish prohibition of images.

But neither the assumption of the destruction of a great number of illustrated Jewish manuscripts in the Middle Ages nor quotations such as those above offer indisputable proof of the connection between ancient Jewish paintings and medieval Jewish manuscript illustrations. In order to give here such proof and to demonstrate the continuation of Jewish art up to the Middle Ages, it will be necessary to complement our discussion of the existing antique Jewish paintings with descriptions of illustrations in Christian manuscripts. Obviously the purpose can be fulfilled only by Christian manuscript illustrations whose archetypes had been drafted in ancient Jewish workshops and then taken over by Christian painters in search of models. Among these Christian pictures of Jewish origin we must distinguish between two different groups. In the first group we have pictures whose Jewish models can be proved by corresponding scenes either in the synagogue of Dura Europos or in some other ancient Jewish work of art. In the second we have Old Testament scenes that obviously differ from the canonic Bible text but either correspond to a Jewish Bible paraphrase, a targum, or can be explained far better by a rabbinic commentary, a midrash, than by the Bible text alone.

Can we find evidence that the "Jewish Art" found in the synagogue at Dura Europos was known in Jewish circles of that era? As Claire Moore pointed out, the following may provide some evidence:

**תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת עבודה זרה פרק ג'–ביומי רבי יהונתן שرون צירין על בותלא ולא מהי בידיהו.**

*Translation: In the days of Rav Yochonon (which may have overlapped with the era in which the synagogue in Dura Europos stood) paintings were found on walls and he did not object.*

The **תלמוד בבלי** appears to have taken a position that was opposite that of the **תלמוד ירושלמי**:

**תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קמ"ט ע"א –תנו רבנן: כתוב המהלך תחת הצורה ותחת הדיווקנות, אסור לקרוטו בשבת. ודיווקנא עצמה, אף בחול אסור להסתכל בה, משום שנאמר (ויקרא יט) אל תפנו אל האלים.**

*Translation: The Rabbis taught: One is forbidden to read a caption that runs under a picture or a fresco on Shabbat. Concerning frescoes, it is not permitted to gaze at them even during the week, based on the verse (Va'Yikra 19,4): do not give your attention to idols.*

What was the definition of frescoes?

**רש"י מסכת שבת דף קמ"ט ע"א – כתוב המהלך תחת הצורה ותחת הדיווקנות – בנוון בני**

אדם המציירים בכותל חוות משונות, או דיווקנות של בני אדם של מעשים, כגון מלחמת דוד וגולית, ובוחתין תחתיה זו צורת החיים פלונית, והוא דיווקנית פלוני ופלונית.

Translation: Such as pictures drawn by artists on walls in which they portray a variety of animals or frescoes depicting scenes involving famous people, such as the battle of David and Goliath. Under those pictures, the artist occasionally provide captions in which he describes what type of animal he has portrayed or what well known scene the fresco represents.

From the following it appears that in the Middle Ages some synagogues had walls covered by frescoes as well. The refers to a question being posed to מהר"ם מרוטנבורג, Rabbi Ephraim of Regensberg, a mid-12th Century Rabbinic authority, about the paintings on the walls of a synagogue in Cologne, Germany:

שוו"ת מהר"ם מרוטנבורג חלק ד (דף פראג) סימן תרי-השיב רבי אפרים מרעננסבורק את רבינו יואל הלוי בספר אביה'ה בס"י אלף ומ"ט . . . ועפ' הראיות האלה צוה להסיר צורת אריות ונחשים שצ'ירו בבי"ההכנ בקלונייא.

Translation: Rabbi Ephraim of Regensberg answered Rabbi Yoel Ha'Levi . . . based on these sources, Rabbi Ephraim ordered that the images of lions and snakes be removed from the walls of a synagogue in Cologne.

The Halachic problem that illustration raises is a possible violation of the second of the עשרת הדברות:

לא תעשה לך פסל וכל תמונה אשר בשמים ממעל ואשר בארץ מתחת ואשר במים מתחת לארץ.

Translation: You shall not make for you any engraved image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

This is how the **רמב"ם** explains the prohibition:

רמב"ם הלכות עבודה זרה פרק ג' הלכה יי'-אסור לעשות צורות לנווי ואף על פי שאיןה עבדת כוכבים שנאמר לא תעשן אני כלומר צורות של כסף וזהב שאינם אלא צורה כדי שלא יטעו בהן הטוענים וידמו שהם העבודה כוכבים, ואין אסור לצור לנווי אלא צורת האדם בלבד, לפיכך אין מציארים לא בעץ ולא בסיד ולא באבן צורת האדם, והוא שתיה הצורה בולטה כגון הציפור והכיפור שבטרקלין וכיוצא בהן ואם צר לוקה, אבל אם הייתה הצורה מושקעת או צורה של סמןין כגון הצורות שעל גבי הלוחות והטבליות או צורות שרוקמין באրיג הרוי אלו מותרות.

Translation: It is unlawful to create a form as a decoration even though the form will not be used for idol worship because the Torah teaches: do make make of Me; in other words, forms made out of gold and silver that are for decorative purposes only. The reason for the prohibition is to prevent those who might err in believing that the form was made for purposes of idol worship. Nevertheless, the only prohibition as to a form that is for decorative purposes, concerns creating a form of a man. As a result, it is improper to create

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*the image of a man formed from wood, plaster or stone. By that I mean a form that is raised, as we find drawings and sculptures that are in public buildings. If someone creates such art, he is to be punished but if the form is one-dimensional or in the form of a logo like the forms that are on the Ten Commandments or forms that are embroidered in fabric,<sup>1</sup> it is a permitted form.*

The הנחות מימוניות<sup>2</sup> adds the following note:

**הנחות מימוניות הלכות עבודה זרה פרק ג' הלבה י'** – לשון הטור והא אסורין בצורת אדם ודרקון דוקא בצורה שלימה בכל איבריה אבל צורת ראש או גוף ללא ראש<sup>3</sup> אין בה שום איסור לא במוצאו ולא בעושה ע"ב.

*Translation: The Tur explains that we prohibit the form of a human only if it is a complete representation, with all of its limbs (like a statue) but if it is a form that contains only the head or the body without a head, it constitutes a form that is not prohibited from being created or displayed.*

The נמרא provides an additional example of “Jewish Art”. This one involves the illustration of ספרי תורה:

**תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קג' עמ' ב'-או שבתב את האוצרות בזהב, הרי אלו יגנוו!**

*Translation: The decorating of G-d's name in a Sefer Torah by writing the letters of G-d's name in gold ink causes the Sefer Torah to be unusable. It should then be placed in storage to await proper disposal.*

Such a Torah scroll is described in :

**מסכתות קטנות מסכת סופרים פרק א' הלכה ח'-אין כותבין בזהב. מעשה בתורתו של אלכסנדרוס שהיו כל אוצרותיה כתובות בזהב, ובא מעשה לפניו חכמים, ואמרו תיגנו.**

*Translation: It is improper to write any letters of the Torah in gold ink. A question was once asked of our Sages concerning the use of the Torah scroll owned by Alexander the Great. In that Torah scroll, the letters in G-d's name were written in gold ink. Our Sages ruled that the Sefer Torah was unusable and needed to be placed in storage to await proper disposal.*

The רמב"ם codified the rule:

**רמב"ם הלכות תפילין ומזוזה וספר תורה פרק א', הלכה ה'-אם בן מה מיעתה ההלבנה שנאמר למשה מסיני שהיה כתובים בדיו, למעט שאר מיני צבעוניין כגון האדום והירוק וכיוצא בהן, שם כתב בספרים או בתפילין או במזוזות אפילו אחת בשאר מיני צבעוניין או בזהב הרי אלו פסולים.**

1. This may be a reference to what is now embroidered on Torah scroll covers.
2. Rabbi Meir ben Rabbi Yekutiel HaKohen of Rothenburg was born circa 1260. He attended the yeshiva of the Rabbi Meir (Maharam) of Rothenburg, and personally attended Maharam during his years of captivity, until the latter's death in 1293. During Rabbi Meir's lifetime, Maimonides' Mishneh Torah became widely available across Europe. The halachic decisions of the Mishneh Torah were often at variance with accepted Ashkenazic halachic decisions and practice. Consequently, Rabbi Meir wrote glosses on ten volumes of the Mishneh Torah (excluding Zeraim, Avodah, Korbanot, and Tahara) detailing the halachic decisions of the Tosafists and Ashkenazic Torah scholars. (Bar Ilan Digital Library)
3. This may explain the reason that the artist who drew the pictures in the Bird's Head Haggadah (the earliest Ashkenazic Haggadah manuscript that includes illustrations estimated to have been composed around 1300 CE) used birds' heads instead of human faces to portray men and women.

*Translation: Therefore what did our Sages mean when they said that it is a rule passed to us from Moshe Rabbenu, who learned it while staying on Mount Sinai, that a Sefer Torah be written in ink? Our Sages wanted to preclude the use of any colored inks such as red or green, etc. If anyone uses such ink to write even one letter of a Sefer Torah, Tephilin or Mezuzah, they cause the object to be Halachically unusable.*

The **שולחן ערוך** expands upon the rule:

**שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות תפילין סימן לב' סעיף ג' כתוב אף' אות א' בשאר מיני צבעונים או בזהב, הרי אלו פסולים. אם זרך עפרות זהב על האותיות, מעביר הזהב ויישאר כתוב התחתון ובשר. אבל אם זרך הזהב על אות מאוכרות, אין לו תקנה לפיה שאסור להעביר הזהב, משום דהוא במוחק את השם.**

*Translation: If someone wrote even one letter of a Sefer Torah, Tephilin or a Mezuzah with any colored ink or with gold, the object may not be used. If he sprinkled gold dust over the letters, he should remove the gold dust. Provided that the underlying lettering remains intact, he may continue to use the Sefer. However if any of the gold dust fell on any of the letters of G-d's names, the Sefer Torah cannot be fixed because it is impossible to properly remove the gold dust that falls on the names of G-d. Trying to do so constitutes an act of erasing G-d's name.*

Let us close by noting the approximate date when illustrated Haggadot made their first appearance. Professor Katrin Kogman-Appel, in an article entitled: "Hebrew Manuscript Painting in the Late Medieval Spain: Signs of a Culture in Transition" The Art Bulletin, Vol. 84, Issue 2, provides such a date:

Whereas before its appearance in Spain about 1230 the decorated Hebrew Bible already had a century-long tradition in the Middle East, the illustrated Passover Haggadah emerged in Europe as a new type of book about 1300. Indeed, it had not become a separate volume until the thirteenth century, having formerly been a part of the general prayer book.

Examples of illustrated manuscript **הגדות**, pages of which can be found on the internet, include the Golden Haggadah, the Bird's Head Haggadah and the Sarajevo Haggadah.

A scene from the Bird's Head Haggadah, Germany 1300 CE



## הנדות ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PRINTED

Perhaps one of the more baffling illustrations that is found in printed **הגדות** concerns the one portraying a hare hunt that is sometimes found placed in the section of the **הגדה** in which **קידוש** is included. Professor Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi in his book, Haggadah and History, JPS, 2005, provides the following explanation:

AUGSBURG · 1534  
[CONTINUED]  
Jagen-has—*the Hunting of the Hares*

The hare-hunting scenes that figure in early Haggadah illustrations were the result of a coincidence. The order for beginning a Seder on a Saturday night was memorized by combining the initials of a series of Hebrew catchwords into one artificial word—YaKeNHaZ (sometimes pronounced as *yaknehz*). The sequence comprises blessings over wine (*yayin*), the sanctification (*kiddush*) of the festival, the candle (*ner*) lit when the Sabbath ends, the separation (*havdalah*) of the Sabbath from weekdays, and the thanksgiving blessing for having reached this festive time (*zeman*). To Ashkenazic Jews, YaKeNHaZ sounded like the German *Jagen-has*, “hare hunt,” which thereby came to be illustrated as such in the Haggadah.

Usually (as in the Prague Haggadah, below), the hunter and his hounds are merely shown chasing the hares. In the Augsburg Haggadah for the first time we have *two* scenes. In the first (opposite) the hounds are driving the hares into a net. In the second (Plate 16) the hares escape.



Prague, 1526

## The Four Sons As Depicted Over The Centuries

Amsterdam 1695



France 1800's



USA-Eisenstein 1920



Jerusalem 1937



Modern Sephardic Haggada

**אפיקומן:**

מה הוא אומר מה הצלבורה להזאת  
לכם לכם ולא לך ולפי שהוזיא  
את עצמו מן הכלל בפר בערך  
ואמור לו אף אפה מקלה את שינו  
לי בטהתי ממתקום לי ולא לך  
אלו היה שם לא היה נגאל: