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The Role of Hebrew Letters in Making the Divine Visible

Katrin Kogman-Appel

When Jewish figural book art began to develop in central Europe around the middle of the thirteenth century, the patrons and artists of Hebrew liturgical books easily opened up to the tastes, fashions, and conventions of Latin illuminated manuscripts and other forms of Christian art. Jewish book designers dealt with the visual culture they encountered in the environment in which they lived with a complex process of transmission, adaptation, and translation. Among the wealth of Christian visual themes, however, there was one that the Jews could not integrate into their religious culture: they were not prepared to create anthropomorphic representations of God. This stand does not imply that Jewish imagery never met the challenge involved in representing the Divine. Among the most lavish medieval Hebrew manuscripts is a group of prayer books that contain the liturgical hymns that were commonly part of central European prayer rites. Many of these hymns address God by means of lavish golden initial words that refer to the Divine. These initials were integrated into the overall imagery of decorated initial panels, their frames, and entire page layouts in manifold ways to be analyzed in what follows. Jewish artists and patrons developed interesting strategies to cope with the need to avoid anthropomorphism and still to give way to visually powerful manifestations of the divine presence.

Among the standard themes in medieval Ashkenazi illuminated Hebrew prayer books (*mahzorim*)[1] we find images of Moses receiving the tablets of the Law on Mount Sinai (Exodus 31:18, 34), commemorated during the holiday of Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks (fig. 8.1). Ashkenazi mahzorim, usually made up of two very large volumes, do not contain the statutory prayers, but rather include a set of liturgical embellishments (*piyyutim*), which became a key feature of the Ashkenazi prayer rites during the Middle Ages. As is common for the iconographic programs of most mahzorim, the first piyyut of each holiday's liturgy was the most lavishly adorned. The Shavuot liturgy begins with the piyyut *adon imnani* ("The Lord Has Nourished Me").[2] This hymn, sung, so to speak, by the Torah,

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[1] In the following a simplified system of transliteration is used (similar to what is common in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*): there is no distinction between the letters ה (he) and ח (het), both are transliterated as h (*mahzor*); א (aleph) has no extra mark (*adon*); ע ('ayin) is marked by an inverted apostrophe (*'anfehem*); ק (quf) appears as q, whereas כ (k(h)af) appears as k or kh (*ashkenaz*, *bekhol*); פ (peh or feh) appears either as p or f (*sefer*); there is no distinction between ש (sin) and ס (samekh), both are transliterated as s (*sefer*); ז (zayin) appears as z (*mahzor*).

[2] Israel Davidson, *Thesaurus of Hebrew Poems and Liturgical Hymns from the Canonization of Scripture to the Emancipation* (New York, 1924), 1:24, no. 484; Jonah Fraenkel, ed., *Mahzor shavuot lefi minhage bene ashkenaz lekhol 'anfehem* (Jerusalem, 2000), 97–101.

FIG. 8.1.
Opening page for the Shavuot service, Leipzig Mahzor, Worms, ca. 1310, fol. 130v. Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. V. 1002/I, Mahzor.

Photo courtesy of the Universitätsbibliothek, Leipzig.

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deals poetically with the role of the Law in Israel. Hence, the most common iconography for this poem and the entire Shavuot service in medieval mahzorim from the German lands is a narrative representation of the giving of the Law.[3]

We find the same piyyut, "The Lord Has Nourished Me," illustrated in the so-called Laud Mahzor, now held in Oxford, written and illuminated around 1250 in the southern German lands, but the imagery there is slightly different (fig. 8.2).[4] The transmission of the Law is squeezed into a small section near the upper

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[3] For a short overview of the Ashkenazi mahzorim and basic iconographic treatment, see Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *Le mahzor enluminé: Les voies de formation d'un programme iconographique* (Leiden, 1983).

[4] For basic information on the manuscript and its pictorial program, see ibid., 14, 64–66.

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FIG. 8.2. Opening page for the Shavuot service, Laud Mahzor, southern Germany, ca. 1250. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Or. Laud 321.

Photo courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

edge of the miniature, where an angel holds the two tablets; on the right, the Law is passed on to three bird-headed representatives of the people of Israel in the form of a Torah scroll. Unlike parallels elsewhere, the focus of the Laud Mahzor image seems to shift away from the giving of the Law to the large architectural structure that occupies most of the picture space. A large arch circumscribes the initial word of the liturgical hymn, *adon* (the Lord), which is set between two horizontal beams that support the arch.[5] The space between the beams and the

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[5] The embellishment of initial words is as popular in Hebrew manuscript painting as is the decoration of initial letters in Christian book art. Some of these initial words simply appear enlarged or written in silver and gold. Other, more elaborate words were embedded in full-fledged painted compositions. In most cases these words do not have any particular iconographic significance, but in the few examples discussed here, I submit, they do.

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FIG. 8.3. Coin issued during the Bar-Kokhba revolt, Palestine, 132–135 CE. Jerusalem, Israel Museum, the Temple and the Ark of Covenant.

Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

arch is devoted to a depiction of a sacrificial rite. The representation of an arch of that particular shape and appearance with the portrayal of a sacrifice beneath it links this imagery with one of the most common symbols of Jewish art since late antiquity. The image suggests the Temple in Jerusalem, the desert Tabernacle, and the Ark of the Covenant—or, rather, all three notions combined. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, a schematic shape, rectangular at the base with a curved top, developed into a symbol of the Tabernacle/Temple implying the eschatological hope that the sanctuary will be rebuilt in messianic times. An early example of this imagery is a coin minted by Bar-Kokhba during the revolt of 132–135 CE showing that shape within a small temple-like structure (fig. 8.3).[6] The rectangular lower part is a graphic symbol that developed from the shape of the Ark, whereas the half-moon top represents the flat lid, the *kapporet*, with the two cherubim above it (echoed in the curved line).[7] This basic structure developed into yet more abstract and stylized shapes in the Middle Ages, turning into a widespread convention communicating the message of messianic (and political) hope.[8]

In the Middle Ages this symbol, which was also adopted in Christian art, occasionally took on a different form. We find it in several examples from Iberia, in both Christian and Jewish contexts, where it appears as an arch functioning, so to speak, as a gateway opening onto the space where a sacrifice is taking place or the Ark is on display. In the Sarajevo Haggadah from circa 1330, for example, the arch opens onto the Holy of Holies (fig. 8.4).[9] The Laud Mahzor (see fig. 8.2) uses the arch in a similar way, and its upper edge appears to represent the curved line of Mount Sinai, as if to identify the arch with that mountain. The small, stylized, green plant set on the apex of the arch seems to turn it into a part of nature—a mountain. Several rabbinic commentaries identify Mount Sinai with both the site of the Binding of Isaac and the Temple Mount.[10] The arch, which also functions as a framing device creating cohesion between the different iconographic elements, should be understood as a symbol, not as a reference to an actual physical space.

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[6] Elisabeth Revel-Neher, *L'Arche d'Alliance dans l'art juif et chrétien du second au dixième siècles: Le signe de la rencontre* (Paris, 1984).

[7] Exod. 25:17–18.

[8] Elisabeth Revel-Neher, *Le témoignage de l'absence: Les objets du sanctuaire à Byzance et dans l'art juif du* XI^{e} *au* XV^{e} *siècle* (Paris, 1998); Shulamit Laderman, *Images of Cosmology in Jewish and Byzantine Art: God's Blueprint of Creation* (Leiden and Boston, 2013).

[9] Katrin Kogman-Appel and Shulamit Laderman, "The Sarajevo Haggadah: The Concept of *Creatio ex nihilo* and the Hermeneutical School Behind It," *Studies in Iconography* 25 (2004): 85–128, esp. 103–6. Arches appear in numerous forms as organizing compositional devices, especially as framing decoration; in most cases they bear no iconographic significance. However, given the earlier history of the ark shape and the fact that the arch in the Laud Mahzor appears in conjunction with the sacrificial theme, I suggest that this particular arch refers to the Temple/Tabernacle theme. The horizontal beams further underline this echo of the ark symbol known from earlier Jewish art.

[10] For example, Solomon Buber, ed., *Midrash tehillim hamekhune shoher tov* on Ps. 68:15 (Vilnius, 1890), 320; for an English translation, see William G. Braude, ed. and trans., *Midrash on Psalms* (New Haven, 1959), 1:544.

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FIG. 8.4. Messianic Temple, Sarajevo Haggadah, Aragon, ca. 1330, fol. 32r. Sarajevo, National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Photo courtesy the Jewish community, Sarajevo.

Diverging from the straightforward approach of other Ashkenazi prayer books with their narratives of the giving of the Law, the Laud image juxtaposes the Law and the sacrificial cult. What we see here is, in fact, the initiation of the sacrificial cult described in Exodus, chapter twenty-nine; the meeting place of the cult, the Temple (and initially the Tabernacle), is indicated by the large arch, columns, and the two horizontal beams. The arch thus takes us beyond the plain biblical narrative into the more complex layers of this imagery.[11] The sacrifice takes place in either the Tabernacle or the Temple, two concepts—one referencing the temporary movable sanctuary and the other the permanent structure in Jerusalem—that cannot be separated. The appearance of the arch and beams in the color of limestone, with realistic architectural features, suggests that the designer of the composition intended to represent the Temple. The large initial word *adon* ("the Lord") between the two horizontal beams, which are integral parts of the architectural structure, seems to emphasize the notion of the Temple as God's dwelling place.[12] As is well known, a pictorial representation of God as a figure is unthinkable of in Jewish art.

In another, slightly later mahzor produced in Worms in the middle Rhine region, but now held in the University Library at Leipzig, we find another example of an iconographic use of letters to represent the Divine (fig. 8.5). The Sabbaths before Purim and before Passover are considered "special Sabbaths," and are characterized by extra reading portions in addition to the regular pericopes that follow the order of the Bible. The opening page of the liturgy for the morning service of *shabbat sheqalim* shows the text of the first piyyut to be recited during that service. Entitled *el mitnasse* ("God, the mighty one"), the poem refers repeatedly to the extra Torah reading (*sheqalim*).[13] The sheqalim reading describes the Israelites each offering half a sheqel for the construction of the Tabernacle. The sum is referred to as a ransom "to avert plague breaking out among them," and the Israelites are promised expiation and atonement.[14] The wording of the hymn tightly links the ransom with the atonement for sins. However, the first part of the poem also refers repeatedly to the glory of God and concludes with an allusion to the divine throne as it is described in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel:

> And above the firmament that was over their [the four living creatures'] heads was the

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[11] For a more extensive discussion of the Temple imagery on this page, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, "The Temple of Jerusalem and the Hebrew Millennium in a Thirteenth-Century Jewish Prayer Book," in *Jerusalem as Narrative Space: Erzählraum Jerusalem*, ed. Annette Hoffmann and Gerhard Wolf (Leiden, 2012), 187–208.

[12] Exod. 25–29.

[13] Davidson, *Thesaurus*, 1:178, no. 3853.

[14] Exod. 30:11–16.

FIG. 8.5.
Sheqalim pericope, Leipzig Mahzor, Worms, ca. 1310, fol. 31v. Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. V. 1102/I.
Photo courtesy of the Universitätsbibliothek, Leipzig.

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> likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above (1:26).[15]

The opening word, *el*, "God," is shown within a large panel, written in gold and bordered by medallions with Ezekiel's four creatures, two on each side.[16] We also see a balance scale in the center of the composition, flanked by two dragons that seem to be toying with the weight on the balance.[17] The balance refers to the sheqel contributions of the Israelites, but as I have shown elsewhere, the scales are also a common symbol

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[15] Translations from the Bible are based on the *Jewish Publication Society Bible* (Philadelphia, 1917).

[16] Ezek. 1:5–11.

[17] On dragons as symbols of evil, see Ilia Rodov, "Dragons: A Symbol of Evil in European Synagogue Decoration?" *Ars Judaica* 1 (2005): 63–84.

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FIG. 8.6.
Ezekiel's vision, Bible in German, Swabia 1477, fol. 256r. Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cpg 18.

Photo courtesy of the Universitätsbibliothek, Heidelberg.

for the atonement of sin.[18] The scales, which are attached to the upper frame by a hook, appear to be balanced. The vertical pole of the balance rests upon the lamed of the alef-lamed ligature standing for *el*, thus suggesting that it is God who holds the balance. According to several penitential traditions, it is God between the four living creatures who receives the repentant.[19]

A brief look at a similar composition in a Christian Bible lets us understand that the gold letters that form the word *el* are in place of the figure of God in the center between the medallions. Ezekiel's vision, a prominent theme in medieval Christian art, is depicted for example in a fifteenth-century German Bible in an image that makes this point particularly clear (fig. 8.6). The fact that the balance scales hang from the letters shows vividly that the word not only replaces the Christian image of God, but that it is actively integrated into the overall meaning of the imagery. The word is not merely a decorative element, but has turned into a definitive part of the iconography to become an active agent in the communication of the message being conveyed. Furthermore, the ligature merges the two letters into a single entity, one sign—there are two letters, but only one iconographic agent.

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[18] Katrin Kogman-Appel, "The Scales in the Leipzig Mahzor: Penance and Eschatology in Fourteenth-Century Germany," in *Between Judaism and Christianity: Art Historical Essays in Honor of Elisheva (Elisabeth) Revel-Neher*, ed. Mati Meyer and Katrin Kogman-Appel (Leiden, 2009), 307–18; eadem, *A Mahzor from Worms: Art and Religion in a Medieval Jewish Community* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), chap. 5.

[19] For details, see ibid.

Divine intervention is also alluded to at the beginning of the piyyut *ata he'arta or* ("You [= God] Lit the Light")[20] for the last day of Passover in the Laud Mahzor (fig. 8.7). The initial word "you," addressing God, stands between the Israelites departing from Egypt and the pursuing Egyptians, as if to protect the former from the latter. I shall return to the narrative of the Departure from Egypt and divine protection further on.

These examples demonstrate that in Jewish iconography words such as "God," "the Lord," and "you" not only replace the anthropomorphic representation of God often found in Christian iconography, but unacceptable in a Jewish context, but also can be actively integrated into the overall imagery. They represent God's residence in the Temple, his presence at the Last Judgment, holding the balance scale, and divine protection.

Whether the biblical prohibition "you shall not make a graven image"[21] is understood broadly, in the sense that no created being should be depicted in any form, or more specifically as restricting three-dimensional figurations, one point is unquestionable: God is beyond representation.[22] Indeed, the commandment, which came out of the need to counter polytheistic idol worship, clearly was not directed at mere artistic production, but focused rather on the aspect of worship. Hence during the late antique period the approach to the biblical prohibition was slightly altered and allowed for the possibility of two-dimensional portrayals of plants, animals, and human figures. Figural painting was widely practiced during the early Talmudic period, until about 550, but with the exception of several images of the hand of God, figural depictions within Jewish culture do not normally include a full or even a partial anthropomorphic representation of the Deity.

However, the Bible and the post-biblical tradition do tend to refer to God anthropomorphically. Not only did God create man in his own image, according to the book of Genesis,[23] but the Bible and Talmudic literature are replete with details such as the hand of God, God putting on phylacteries, and so on.[24] The description of the bridegroom in the Song of Songs is intensely anthropomorphic and, particularly in the Middle Ages, was usually understood as an allegorical representation of God offering his love to his people.[25] Allegory, in fact, grew into the most common method of coping with biblical anthropomorphism. Such descriptions were approached as allegories of theophany, rather than as references to revelations of an anthropomorphic God.

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[20] Davidson, *Thesaurus*, 1:396, no. 8745; Jonah Fraenkel, ed., *Mahzor pesah lefi minhage bene ashkenaz lekhol 'anfehem* (Jerusalem, 1993), 423–28.

[21] Exod. 20:4.

[22] The following section on anthropomorphism is based on my discussion of Pietist approaches to anthropomorphism in the context of a representation of the feminine *shekhinah*, in *Mahzor from Worms*, 147–51.

[23] Gen. 1:26.

[24] *bBer*, 6a.

[25] Song of Songs, chap. 5. For some background on the literal and the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs, in particular on the anthropomorphic aspects, see Sarah Japhet, "The Literal Meaning of the Song of Songs: On Rashi and His Followers as Interpreters of the Literal Meaning [in Hebrew]," in *Collected Studies in Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Sarah Japhet (Jerusalem, 2008), 135–56; on allegorical interpretations vs. literal explanations of the Song of Songs, see eadem, "Description of the Body and Images of Beauty [in Hebrew]," in *Papers on the Interpretations of the Bible and the Quran in the Middle Ages Presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai*, ed. Meir Bar Asher, Simon Hopkins, Sarah Stroumsa, and Bruno Chiesa (Jerusalem, 2007), 133–62, repr. in eadem, *Collected Studies*, 54–84; for a list of medieval commentaries on the Song of Songs, see Barry D. Walfish, "Annotated Bibliography of Jewish Commentaries to the Song of Songs [in Hebrew]," in *The Bible in the Light of Its Commentators: Collective Volume in Memory of Sarah Kamin*, ed. Sarah Japhet (Jerusalem, 1994), 518–71; and Ivan G. Marcus, "The Song of Songs in German Hasidism and the School of Rashi: A Preliminary Comparison," in *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, ed. Barry D. Walfish (Haifa, 1993), 1:181–89.

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FIG. 8.7. Last day of Passover, Egyptian army pursues the children of Israel, Laud Mahzor, southern Germany, ca. 1250, fol. 108r. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Or. Laud 321.

Photo courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

However, things were not always so clear-cut. In the twelfth century the Sefardi philosopher Moses Maimonides noted "our Sages were far from the belief in the corporeality of God."[26] If anthropomorphism were indeed a taboo, then why would Maimonides have to underscore that the Talmudic Rabbis were "far from the belief in the corporeality of God?" His words must have been directed toward people who cast doubt on this assumption. Maimonides was clearly concerned with the possibility that some Jews held less radical views on anthropomorphism than his own. Furthermore, we now know that in his assumption about the Talmudic Rabbis Maimonides was somewhat misled, and Yair Lorberbaum has recently shown that late antique and medieval Jewish approaches to anthropomorphism varied greatly.[27] Not only are the Bible and rabbinic literature full of anthropomorphic references to God, but late antique mystical literature is also replete with such allusions. Time and time again the *Hekhalot* tradition, a group of late antique mystical texts about the heavenly shrines, refers to God anthropomorphically, and the so-called *Shi'ur Qomah* texts discuss the enormous size of God and his limbs.[28] Lorberbaum also suggests that clear anthropomorphic views can be observed in mainstream rabbinic thought.[29]

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[26] *Moreh hanevuhim*, ed. and trans. Michael Schwarz (Tel Aviv, 2002), pt. 1, chap. 46; for an English version, see Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Michael Friedländer (London, 1904).

Whereas in the biblical tradition and in late antiquity verbal anthropomorphism was apparently quite common, Maimonides took a far more radical turn and condemned even an imagined picture of God. Verbal description of anthropomorphic features of the Divine, he argued, sets the imagination working and an imagined picture of God would, in fact, turn every prayer into a sinful act of idolatry.[30] The difficulties medieval philosophers had with the essence of God and the resulting question of how to refer to prophetic revelation led to a variety of approaches. Maimonides's position is clearly one of radical anti-anthropomorphism. God is abstract at all times and can never be described in terms of human features; divine revelation can be understood only as a result of the Prophets' imagination. However, a controversy that shook the Sefardi intelligentsia for more than a hundred years after Maimonides's death shows that there was also opposition to his radical anti-anthropomorphism, particularly among scholars in northern France.[31] Neither of the two positions, however, was open to the possibility of a visual representation of the Divine in human form. The notion of an anthropomorphic God does not necessarily encourage the creation of a physical anthropomorphic image. On the contrary, the fear that verbal anthropomorphism might eventually generate visual representation meant that the prohibition of visual representation of the Divine was all the more serious a matter.

Issues of anthropomorphism were also a concern of a small group of scholars in the Rhineland, commonly referred to as the "Ashkenazi Pietists," active during the late twelfth and the early thirteenth centuries. The Pietists were a group of rabbis, mostly from one clan—the Qalonymide family of the Rhineland—who shared an ascetic attitude toward life, a rather complex set of ethical values, and an abiding interest in mysticism.[32] The Pietists wrote several treatises that targeted questions of anthropomorphism and divine revelation, but the picture we get from these writings is not entirely clear. In fact, whereas the Pietists certainly opposed anthropomorphism, they occupied themselves intensely with late antique anthropomorphic descriptions, so their overall attitude seems somewhat contradictory. Pietist thought implies, somewhat similarly to Maimonides's position described above, that the Creator is hidden from any human experience of the senses. He is abstract, has no material form or physical presence, and has never been revealed in any form. A central question in Maimonides's thought concerns the form of the divine revelations experienced by the Prophets. Similarly, the Pietists created a large corpus of writings, most of it esoteric, which addressed the apparent contradiction between biblical reports of these divine revelations and the objection to any anthropomorphic description of the Godhead. However, much of this material exists only in manuscript form; as it was intended only for somewhat seclusive groups of scholars who shared an interest in mystics, it was never published.[33]

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[27] Yair Lorberbaum, *Image of God: Halakhah and Aggadah* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 2004).

[28] These texts often reflect on the anthropomorphic descriptions in the Song of Songs; for more background, see the introduction to Rachel Elior, ed., *Hekhalot zutrati*, Mekhqare yerushalayim bemahshevet Israel, suppl. vol. 1 (1982); eadem, "The Uniqueness of the Religious Phenomenon in Hekhalot Literature: The Figure of God and the Limits of Its Perception [in Hebrew]," in *Early Jewish Mysticism*, ed. Joseph Dan, Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 1–2 (Jeruselem, 1987), 13–64, with references to earlier literature. On the scholarship about Hekhalot literature in general, see the useful summary by Ra'anan Boustan, "The Study of Hekhalot Literature: Between Mystical Experience and Textual Artifacts," *Currents in Biblical Research* 6, no. 1 (2007): 130–60. Earlier scholarship has dated the beginning of Hekhalot literature to the second century; recent scholarship, however, tends to postdate it to the sixth or seventh; see ibid.

[29] Lorberbaum, *Image*. For some earlier, less comprehensive treatments of possible rabbinic anthropomorphism, see, e.g., David Stern, "*Imitatio Hominis:* Anthropomorphism and the Character(s) of God in Rabbinic Literature," *Prooftexts* 12 (1992): 151–74; Moshe Halbertal, "Would It Not Be Written in the Bible [in Hebrew]," *Tarbiz* 68, no. 1 (1999): 39–59; and Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *HTR* 87, no. 2 (1994): 171–95, who goes so far as to claim that there is an anthropomorphic position to be found even in the literature of the Tannaim, the rabbis of Palestine in the first two centuries CE; Lorberbaum disagrees with this view and argues that reservations concerning anthropomorphism can be found in early rabbinic sources (*Image*, 27). For a full survey of past research on this matter, see ibid., chap. 1.

[30] For more details, see Moshe Halbertal, "Of Pictures and Words: Visual and Verbal Representations of God," in *The Divine Image: Depicting God in Jewish and Israeli Art*, exh. cat. (Jerusalem, 2006), 7–13.

[31] For a detailed discussion of northern French Jewish ("Tosafist") approaches to these matters, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Varieties of Belief in Medieval Ashkenaz: The Case of Anthropomorphism," in *Rabbinic Culture and Its Critics: Jewish Authority, Dissent, and Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, ed. Daniel Frank and Matt Goldish (Detroit, 2008), 117–19.

[32] Literature on the Pietists is extensive and cannot be listed in full here. Ivan Marcus's pioneer study has turned into a classic, as it defines the group in social and intellectual terms: *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden, 1981); see also idem, "Judah the Pietist and Eleazar of Worms: From Charismatic to Conventional Leadership," in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the 13th Century*, ed. Moshe Idel and Mortimer Ostow (Northvale, N.J., and Jerusalem, 1998), 97–127; idem, "The Historical Meaning of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*: Fact, Fiction or Cultural Self-Image?" in

Rabbinic sources from late antiquity occasionally refer to divine revelation in terms of *kavod* (literally: "glory"). In a treatise titled "Beliefs and Opinions" by Saadia Gaon, a tenth-century Babylonian scholar, divine revelation is described as an angel named Kavod.[34] Rabbinic scholars referred to it as the *shekhinah*, an appellation for the divine presence on earth (literally: "God's dwelling").[35] Whereas Saadia Gaon, similar to the medieval philosophers, described the kavod as a created being, according to Judah ben Samuel the Pious (d. 1217), one of the leading Pietists, the kavod is related to God by emanation. It is identical with God and as such it emanates from the Creator, with successive emanations forming a chain, and it was the lowest linked member of that chain that was revealed to the Prophets. The Pietists occasionally distinguished between the upper and the revealed kavod.[36]

The distinction between the abstract Creator and the kavod of the prophetic revelations eventually opened the way to various visualizations of the imagined kavod, including depictions of the Glory with anthropomorphic features. By this the Pietists presumably did not mean an ontological being, but rather contended that God is revealed as a reflection of the upper kavod, as a visual equivalent without any physicality, and it is to this reflection that man turns in prayer.[37] On the other hand, it is concentration during prayer, and specifically concentration while uttering the letters of the tetragrammaton together with proper intention and the resulting contemplation, that leads to the visualization of an anthropomorphic image of the shekhinah. The human imagination, where the image is formed, is compared to a mirror in which the shekhinah appears as a reflection of the abstract Godhead.[38]

A mental image of the kavod as the result of a mystic experience could also mean visualization

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Gershom Scholem's "Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism" 50 Years After: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism, ed. Joseph Dan and Peter Schäfer (Tübingen, 1993), 103–14. For a recent summary of the Pietists' mystical interests, see Joseph Dan, *History of Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism: The Middle Ages* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 2011), vols. 5 and 6.

[33] An entire corpus of Pietist literature, the so-called "Literature of Unity" (*sifrut hayihud*), deals with matters of divine revelation; for a detailed discussion, see Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, vol. 5, *Circles of Esotericism in Medieval Germany: The Mystics of the Kalonymus Family*, 175–79.

[34] On the reception of the Hebrew paraphrase of Saadia's work among the Pietists, see Joseph Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1968), 22–24.

[35] *Mishna, Avot*, chap. 3.

[36] Pietist esoteric teachings about the kavod were first discussed by Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1941), 107–18. See also idem, *Origins of the* Kabbalah (Princeton, 1987), 180–87; Dan, *Esoteric Theology*, 104–68; idem, "The Hidden kavod [in Hebrew]," in *Religion and Language: Papers in General and Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Moshe Halamish and Assa Kasher (Tel Aviv, 1982), 71–78; and Asi Farber-Ginat, "The Concept of the Merkavah in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Esotericism: 'Sod Ha-'Egoz' and Its Developments [in Hebrew]" (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986), 401–32.

[37] Moshe Hershler, ed., *Perush siddur hatefilah laroqeah* (Jerusalem, 1994), par. 326.

[38] For further discussions of the Pietists' dealings with the kavod, see, e.g., Daniel Abrams, "'The Secret of All the Secrets': The Approach to the Glory and the Intention in Prayer in the Writings of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms and Its Echoes in Other Texts [in Hebrew]," *Da'at* 34 (1995): 64–65. Elliot R. Wolfson discusses the appearance of the shekhinah as a visualized human form on the throne of Glory, "Metatron and Shi'ur Qomah in the Writings of Haside Ashkenaz," in *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism*, ed. Karl E. Grözinger and Joseph Dan (Berlin and New York, 1995), 69, n. 43.

of the letters of the name of God.[39] In the Jewish tradition every letter equals a number and every word has a numerical value that is made up of the values of all of its letters. Hence a word and its letters carry a heavy exegetical burden. Using these numerical values as an exegetical device (*gematria*) has been practiced since antiquity. The Pietists, in particular, had a very strong interest in numerological exegesis.[40] Central to this line of thought, especially among the Pietists, was the numerological interpretation of the various names of God, words that circumscribe the not-to-be-spoken tetragrammaton, יהוה (YHVH). It was this aspect of the numerology that turned gematria into a favored tool for kabbalists and Pietists. Following up on observations made by Gershom Scholem, Elliot Wolfson points to the "failure" or the "unwillingness" of the Pietists "to recast the older mystical notions within a framework of a coherent metaphysics or ontology, despite their adaptation of a semiphilosophical theology."[41] Hence the Pietists preferred an exegetical method based on "a web of linguistic and numerological associations rather than abstract philosophical concepts."[42]

One of the leading Pietists, Eleazar ben Judah of Worms (d. 1232), a relative and student of Judah the Pious, authored a work titled *Sefer hashem* (The Book of the Name), which lists and interprets numerous designations for God that can serve as substitutes for the tetragrammaton.[43] There is a long list of such designations, including "the name," "Lord," *elohim*, and many more. At the beginning of his text Eleazar described a "secret ceremony of the transmission of the divine name," a ritual in which a master teacher reveals the secrets of the divine name to his pupil. He explained that both the teacher and the pupil, after a long period of learning, prepare themselves by dressing in white and immersing themselves in water, where they recite several blessings and a selection of biblical verses that create a link between the water and the name of God.[44] Thus the name of God served as a vehicle for mystical experience. Samuel of Speyer (twelfth century), the earliest of the Ashkenazi Pietists, was supposed to have ascended to heaven by means of the name of God.[45] In another account the same Samuel filled a schoolhouse with light with the help of the name of God.[46] Such practices were aimed at a visualization of the divine chariot, the heavenly throne, the light of the Glory, which can take on an anthropomorphic shape, or a visualization of the letters of the name of God.

Wolfson discussed the visual aspects of mystic experience in Pietist teachings and other schools in great detail.[47] The role of light in connection with visualizing the Divine is beyond question; moreover, the concept is shared by Islam and Christianity. The use of gold, not only as a symbol of sanctity but also as a device to underscore the presence of the Divine, is a well-known principle in medieval Christian, especially Byzantine, art and is, as such, deeply embedded in Christian theology. As Wolfson demonstrates, however, there are several features "unique to the Jewish mystics," primarily the "configuration of that light in terms of their respective theosophical structures, informed by specific religious and cultural patterns of thought and models of action."[48] There are numerous examples of numerological interpretations of words, such as *hashmal*, an expression used by Ezekiel to define the luminous form of the Glory (Ezekiel 1:4), *nogah* ("radiance"), and *zohar* ("splendor").[49] The fact that the various artists discussed here all used gold leaf for the large letters of the initial words in question cannot be overlooked. Even though the use of gold for initial words in the mahzorim was not reserved for names of God, it is reasonable to associate the use of gold also with the attempt to give visual expression to divine light. In fact, as a great number of medieval piyyutim begin with words that refer to God in one way or another, it follows that many initial words in the mahzorim also refer to God, which gives credence to such an association.

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[39] Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, 1994), chap. 5.

[40] Gematria is strongly associated with the Pietists, but as Haym Soloveichik stresses clearly, by no means should it be seen as their invention: "Piety, Pietism and German Pietism: *Sefer hasidim I* and the Influence of Hasidei Ashkenaz," *JQR* 92 (2002): 455–98, esp. 470–71. There are, however, as Soloveichik points out, specific traits to Pietist numerology; see also Daniel Abrams, "From Germany to Spain: Numerology as a Mystical Technique," *JJS* 47 (1996): 85–101.

[41] Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 189; see also Scholem, *Major Trends*, 86–87.

[42] Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 189.

[43] *Sefer Hashem*, in *Sifre Rabbi El'azar migermaiza ba'al haroqeah*, ed. R. Aharon Eisenbach (Jerusalem, 1994–96), vol. 1. For a discussion of this text, see Joseph Dan, "The Book of the Divine Name by Rabbi Eleazar of Worms," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 22 (1995): 27–60.

[44] *Sefer hashem*, 1. The ritual was first discussed by Gershom Scholem, "Tradition und Neuschöpfung im Ritus der Kabbalisten," *ErJb* 19 (1950): 121–80; for an English version of Scholem's paper, see idem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1964); Dan, *Esoteric Theology,* 75–78; and recently idem, *Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism*, vol. 6, *Rabbi Eleazar of Worms and Thirteenth-Century Circles of Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism in Germany*, 560–62. According to Dan, the main concerns of this ceremony are theological and speculative, a thought that was challenged by other scholars who emphasize the magical elements; see, e.g., Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), 323, n. 171.

[45] Scholem, *Major Trends*, 374 n. 77, discussing a textual tradition that is extant only in manuscripts.

[46] Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 191.

[47] Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*.

The Pietists distinguished between an abstract, hidden, incorporeal Creator and the kavod or shekhinah, an anthropomorphically envisioned entity that would occasionally reveal itself to the Prophets. In any event, we are speaking of verbal anthropomorphism and not of its application to visual representation, which was certainly not something the Pietists had in mind. It was a far cry from the Pietist discussions about the visualized kavod to the issue of such representation in manuscript illumination several decades after the death of the last of the Qalonymide Pietists, Eleazar ben Judah of Worms in 1232.

I am not arguing that the letters designating "the Lord" (*adon*) or "God" (*el*) are visual expressions of a Pietist mindset. These illuminated mahzorim are not pietistic works. But the Pietist concerns with anthropomorphism must have had an impact on the way Jewish illuminators a few decades later approached the representation of the Divine.[50] In the case of the Leipzig Mahzor, the link to Pietism may be even stronger: Eleazar of Worms had lived in the city where the Leipzig Mahzor was produced. I have argued elsewhere that the imagery in that mahzor was a powerful vehicle of community identity and that those who shaped that identity in the early fourteenth century looked back at him as one of the key figures in their cultural history.[51] Eleazar, it should be stressed, was not just a strange, ascetic, sectarian, Pietist scholar, for he also functioned as a communal authority, his signature appearing, for example, on rabbinical decisions of the Rhineland rabbinic council.[52]

I suggest that these initial words in the panels of the Laud and the Leipzig mahzorim can be read against the background of concerns with anthropomorphism of both the Pietists and Sefardi philosophers. These initial words, as they are integrated with the imagery, can be seen as referring to the hidden Godhead as an abstract sign; they circumscribe the revealed kavod, which, although it could be imagined anthropomorphically, was not supposed to be represented pictorially in any form. In fact, we are dealing here with an artistic solution to a complex issue, a solution that did not come from the Pietists or the philosophers, but rather from the artists, who were very much aware of the concerns regarding anthropomorphism.

The tradition of numerological exegesis also helped artists craft solutions to the prohibition of anthropomorphism. Examples of the Pietists' preoccupation with letters, words, and their numerical values are myriad, and discussing them in depth goes beyond the framework of this paper. As noted, I am not suggesting that they actively stood behind the visual concepts developed in the mahzorim. However, at the time these books were designed, their mystical teachings were no longer confined to the medium of oral transmission.[53] They had been written down, even though the texts were clearly not widely dispersed. However, once these teachings appeared on parchment, a process of diffusion must have started, and elements of even the Pietists' most esoteric thoughts became known beyond their narrow sectarian circles. We should not imagine Jewish artists creating complex visual concepts of the visualization of the Divine grounded in a full-fledged array of Pietist mysticism. However, by the early fourteenth century an awareness of those concepts might well have reached broader circles of Jewish patrons and artists, evolving into the inspiration for creative solutions to the prohibition against creating an image of God. The subject matters of the liturgical hymns that these particular panels embellish lend themselves easily to attempts to integrate the word panels as representatives of the divine presence into the overall imagery of the panels.

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[48] Ibid., 228.

[49] Ibid.

[50] The question of how much influence the Pietists had on Ashkenazi Jewish culture, and perhaps beyond, is one of the main controversies in relevant modern scholarship. Some scholars of the past maintained that the Pietists had a crucial influence on the generations that followed and defined the teachings of Isaac ben Moses of Vienna, for example, who had studied with the Pietists, or his disciple Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg, as basically Pietist. See, e.g., the classic contributions by Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Tosafists: Their History, Writings, and Methods* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1954; rev. ed. 1986), chaps. 8 and 10. For a more recent evaluation of the issue from the angle of interactions between Pietist and Tosafist scholarship, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Peering through the Lattices: Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period* (Detroit, 2000). The view that the Pietists had great influence on Ashkenazi society was challenged by Joseph Dan, "Ashkenazi Hasidim, 1941–1991: Was There Really a Hasidic Movement in Medieval Germany?" in *Gershom Scholem's "Major Trends,"* 87–101; see also Sari Halpert, "Elitism and Pietism: An Investigation into the Elitist Nature of the Hasidei Ashkenaz," *The Queens College Journal of Jewish Studies* 2 (2000): 1–7, who argues in favor of Pietist elitism, somewhat simplistically neglecting, however, the fact that Pietism was not a uniform mass of scholarship with a fully homogeneous worldview. Halpert's study is almost exclusively based on evidence from the *Sefer hasidim*. Most notably, the assumption that the Pietists had major influence was criticized by Soloveichik, "Piety, Pietism, and German Pietism"; see also idem, "Pietists and Kibbitzers," *JQR* 96, no. 1 (2006): 60–64.

[51] Kogman-Appel, *A Mahzor from Worms.*

[52] For details see ibid., 48.

It appears, finally, that some of these ideas migrated beyond the realm of Ashkenazi scholarship. This can be demonstrated by yet another example, from Iberia, which creatively integrates letters and words into imagery. In 1366 a Jewish scribe and mapmaker in Mallorca by the name of Elisha Cresques ben Abraham began work on a richly illuminated Bible. On page 150 we find a painting of the menorah and in the adjacent text on page 151 he notes explicitly that he executed the painting himself. The entire project occupied him for more than sixteen years and the codex was not completed until 1383. The colophon also explains that the Bible was made for Elisha's own use and for that of his descendants.[54] The biblical text is preceded by two hundred pages of various writings, which he chose to include in what we can describe as his own personal library. These works embrace a whole range of rabbinic and scientific interests, and enable us to define Elisha's intellectual and cultural profile in quite some detail. They discuss calendrical issues and contain short treatises on philology and masorah, midrashic commentaries, excerpts from the major Hebrew chronographic texts, such as *Seder olam, Seder olam zutta*, and Abraham ibn Daud's *Sefer qabbalah* (ca. 1160), extensive lists of biblical figures and rabbinic scholars, and a Hebrew-Occitan dictionary based largely on David Kimhi's *Sefer hashorashim* from the early thirteenth century. Elisha also clearly had a particular interest in gematria.

Toward the end of this preliminary section there are three openings representing various views of the Temple and its implements. The first of these is well embedded in the Sefardi pictorial tradition regarding the Temple and shows the implements as golden silhouettes spread on a diapered background.[55] There are numerous parallels to this arrangement, which has been widely discussed in research on Hebrew illuminated manuscripts. Scholars agree that these diagrams represent the messianic Temple, whereas the Bible itself, in the absence of a physical Temple, is referred to in Jewish culture as the "minor Temple."[56]

Elisha Cresques went beyond this traditional Sefardi Temple image and offered a more elaborate view of the Temple theme in addition to the conventional depiction of the Sanctuary.

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[53] On the apparent contradiction between a tradition being esoteric and secret (and thus supposed to be only orally transmitted) and putting such teachings into writing, see Dan, "Book of Names," 33.

[54] Farhi Codex, Sassoon Collection, MS 368, Mallorca, 1366–1383, pp. 2–4.

[55] Bezalel Narkiss, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts* [in Hebrew], expanded ed. (Jerusalem, 1984), pl. 16.

[56] Revel-Neher, *Témoignage*; Katrin Kogman-Appel, *Jewish Book Art between Islam and Christianity: The Decoration of Hebrew Bibles in Spain* (Leiden and Boston, 2004), chap. 5; Eva Frojmovic, "Messianic Politic in Re-Christianized Spain: Images of the Sanctuary in Hebrew Bible Manuscripts," in *Imaging the Self, Imaging the Other: Visual Representation and Jewish-Christian Dynamics in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period*, ed. eadem (Leiden and Boston, 2002), 91–128. For a recent summary of the scholarship, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Sephardic Ideas in Ashkenaz: Visualizing the Temple in Medieval Regensburg," in *Science and Philosophy in Ashkenazi Culture: Rejection, Toleration, and Accommodation*, Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts; Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook 8 (2009), ed. Israel Bartal and Gad Freudenthal (Leipzig, 2010), 247–53.

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FIG. 8.8. The high priest's breastplate, Farhi Codex, Mallorca, 1366–83, p. 184. Sassoon Collection, MS. 368.

Photo courtesy R. David Sassoon, Jerusalem.

The next opening shows a somewhat geometric scheme of the high priest's breastplate on the right (verso) (fig. 8.8) and a schematic diagram of the Ark of the Covenant, indicating its shape and its measurements on the left (recto). The breastplate consists of twelve small tablets schematically representing the precious stones inscribed with their names together with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Below the names of the tribes we can discern a few extra letters. "Ruben," consisting of five letters is accompanied by an aleph in the lower line; "Simon," five letters, is accompanied by a beth; "Levi," only three letters, is accompanied by resh, he, and mem. These extra letters together form the name אברהם, "Abraham." Similar letter arrangements appear in the other compartments, and altogether the additional letters beneath the names of the tribes form the sentence "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the tribes of Yeshurun."[57] Each tablet contains six letters, seventy-two altogether, not counting the names of the stones.

The earliest medieval text to refer to the seventy-two letters in the inscriptions on the breastplate is attributed to the previously mentioned Judah ben Samuel the Pious. Like other Pietists he was frequently occupied with gematria. In his *Sefer gematriot*, a numerological commentary to the Pentateuch, he linked the mystic notion of the seventy-two letters of the full divine name with the high priest's breastplate.[58] This tradition is based on the observation that three subsequent verses in Exodus (14:19–21), which refer to the angel of God accompanying and protecting the people of Israel on their journey out of Egypt, all contain seventy-two letters each:

> And the angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud removed from before them, and stood behind them; and it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud and the darkness here, yet gave it light by night there; and the one came not near the other all the night. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all the night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

Owing to the focus on divine protection in these verses a tradition developed according to which the full name of God contains seventy-two letters. This brings us back to the attempt I described above to express divine protection during the Exodus visually (see fig. 8.7). Whether the artist who put the initial word *ata* ("you") between the Israelites and the Egyptians had this observation in mind cannot be said with any certainty. However, it is quite likely that he was familiar with the tradition of the full name of God.

Such traditions go back to late antique midrashim and were later expounded by medieval exegetes. The section in the *Sefer gematriot* is very short and only mentions the "seventy-two letters on the breastplate."[59] In a commentary to the Pentateuch by Eleazar of Worms, or perhaps by one of his students, we find a more explicit description:

> It is written in [the Talmud] twelve tribes, three fathers and the tribes of Yeshurun were inscribed on the breast shield. There were six letters inscribed on every stone. . . . There were seventy-two letters on the breastplate.[60]

Although this motif apparently originated in early thirteenth-century Ashkenazi Pietist

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[57] Yeshurun is a poetic expression for Israel, both the land and the people. See, e.g., Deut. 32:5. The Babylonian Talmud refers to the inscription "the tribes of Yeshurun" on the breastplate, *bYoma* 73b.

[58] For a recent treatment of the *Sefer gematriot*, a version of which is included in the so-called London Miscellany, British Library, Add. MS. 11,639, on the margins of fols. 615–34, see Sara Offenberg, *Illuminated Piety: Pietistic Texts and Images in the North French Hebrew Miscellany* (Los Angeles, 2013), chap. 1 and appendix. For a facsimile version of the extant manuscript source, see Daniel Abrams and Israel Ta-Shema, eds., *Sefer gematriot of R. Judah the Pious: Facsimile Edition of a Unique Manuscript* (Los Angeles, 1998). For a recent edition, see Ya'akov I. Stall, ed., *Sefer gematriot lerabbi yehudah hehassid* (Jerusalem, 2005). The latter edition, which does not have a critical apparatus, presents the commentaries according to the flow of biblical narration, whereas in the original version the text follows a different, more associative arrangement. Interestingly, in the London Miscellany version the commentaries are already edited according to the biblical chronology.

[59] *Sefer gematriot*, 1:501.

[60] Yoel Klugmann, ed., *Perush haroqeah* on Exod. 28:17 (Bne Brak, 2001), 2:151–52.

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FIG. 8.9. Opening page of the book of Genesis, Ashkenazi Bible, southern Germany (Ulm?), 1236, vol. 1, fol. 1r. Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, cod. 30-32/inf.

Photo © Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana—Milano/De Agostini Picture Library.

circles, it also appeared in Aragon around the 1290s. There Bahye ben Asher of Saragossa, a scholar with great interest in early kabbalah, similarly linked the inscriptions on the breastplate with the tradition of the seventy-two letters of the full name of God. Eventually the motif became quite common, and is referred to time and again in early Sefardi kabbalah. The section in Bahye's commentary offers a full description of all the stones with the inscribed letters and concludes as follows:

> You have six letters on each stone; this is to show you that the six days of creation depend on the twelve tribes. And there were seventy-two letters on the breast shield, because

> twelve times six makes seventy-two; and they correspond to the seventy-two letters of the Great Name.[61]

These observations about Elisha Cresques's possible interest in kabbalistic teachings do not necessarily mean that he was an active kabbalist. He may not, in fact, have fully understood the exegetical implications of this motif and added the names of the stones, thus meddling with the precise number of seventy-two.[62] But he clearly must have had a notion of the motif as such. Hence one can argue that the integration of these letters into the design of the breastplate was meant to mark the divine presence in the Temple. This thought brings us back to the initial word in the Laud Mahzor, *adon*, which similarly refers to God's dwelling in the Temple. In the days of the Temple, the high priest, wearing the breastplate, was the only person who was permitted to utter the tetragrammaton and then only on the Day of Atonement.[63]

* * *

The anthropomorphic representation of the Divine is an absolute taboo in Jewish pictorial art. As Maimonides noted, even an imagined anthropomorphic appearance is unthinkable. The artists and scholars who conceived the images presented here sought iconographic solutions for the inclusion of the Divine in the imagery. They countered the prohibition against anthropomorphic representation by integrating opening words of piyyutim, such as "Lord," "God," "you," and "king," into the imagery of initial panels. In the case of the Ashkenazi mahzorim, this was possible because many of the Ashkenazi piyyutim begin with a word that designates "God" in one way or another. Hence, this particular type of initial word encourages a sort of iconographic use of letters. The same idea would not serve in biblical books with, for example, initial words such as *bereshit* ("in the beginning") for Genesis; *ve'ele shmot* ("these are the names") for Exodus; and *vayedabber* ("he spoke") for Numbers. It is this particular feature of liturgical poetry—to begin a poem with the name of God—that makes the integration of letters and imagery possible.

By integration of the initial word into the imagery I mean more than simply the fact that letters or a word are juxtaposed with images. The design of any initial panel could fulfill that function, as one example from a Bible from Ulm demonstrates (fig. 8.9). However, even though word and image seem to be integrated formally and visually, there is no integration of meaning in this image. The iconography chosen depicts one of the stories told in the book, the Temptation of Adam and Eve. The figures of Adam and Eve flank the initial word in a highly attractive design, but the meaning of the imagery would be the same with and without the initial word. Moreover, the absence of the tree, which is replaced by the initial word, in fact, makes the overall iconography less obvious.

The cases from the Laud and Leipzig mahzorim introduced here are different. In these images the words *adon*, *el*, or *ata* play an active role in communicating iconographic meaning. The word *adon* between the two beams of the sanctuary stands for the presence of the Divine within the Temple or the Tabernacle (see fig. 8.2). The word *el* onto which the balance scales are attached stands for God executing the Last Judgment, weighing the virtues and vices of the people of Israel (see fig. 8.5). The word *ata* between the escaping Israelites and the pursuing pharaonic army introduces divine protection into the imagery of the Departure from Egypt (see fig. 8.7). The high priest's physical breastplate reduced to an abstract shape with golden letters that reference the name of God speaks a similar visual language (see fig. 8.8).

There are different levels of integration. The Exodus image in the Laud Mahzor (see fig. 8.7) can be well understood against the background of the biblical narrative per se, but the integration of the initial word adds an extra layer of meaning stressing and underscoring divine protection. On the Shavuot page of the same book (see fig. 8.2), on the other hand, the level of integration seems to be much higher, and the appearance of the initial word *adon* integrated within the architectural structure not only accentuates a particular aspect of the overall imagery but also goes beyond that to emphasize the essence of the Temple as God's dwelling place. Thus it becomes a centerpiece of the communicated message. The same is true to an even greater degree for the sheqalim picture in the Leipzig Mahzor, whose contents would by no means be the same without the initial word and its interaction with the other pictorial elements. The initial word, in fact, becomes the very key to the Pietist understanding of the balance scene. In the Farhi Codex, finally, the use of letters goes beyond this sort of integration of words and imagery and becomes the primary aspect of the overall design. The breastplate, in fact, is represented not as a physical object, but rather as an abstract piece of scribal design: a large square divided into twelve smaller panels all occupied with only the letters and surrounding filigree, which clearly belongs to the domain of scribal work. Calligraphy here turns into the main bearer of the visual message.

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[61] Hayyim Dov Chavel, ed., *Rabbenu Behaye: Bi'ur 'al hatorah*, on Exod. 28:15 (Jerusalem, 1967), 2:298.

[62] The breastplate is depicted similarly in an Ashkenazi Pentateuch in Jerusalem, Israel Museum, MS 180/52 from ca. 1300, fols. 155v–56r. For a discussion of this image, see Kogman-Appel, "Sephardic Ideas," 245–77.

[63] Num. 6:22–27; *bYoma* 39b.

It would appear that this phenomenon of integrating words that refer to the Divine into imagery owes a double debt to Pietist scholarship: it constitutes a creative solution for concerns with anthropomorphism and is indebted to the Pietists' interest in numerological symbolism. The Pietist worldview dealt with issues of vision or visualization, but only within the realm of what we would call imagination and they would call mystic experience. By no means, however, did the Pietists' occupation with vision imply the option of visualization on parchment, that is, the creation of a physical image. It appears, however, that their ideas shaped the surrounding culture beyond the relatively tight borders of Pietist circles and eventually led to creative solutions for coping with the taboo of divine representation. It also seems that their ideas went beyond Ashkenazi culture and inspired Sephardi artists and commentators at a particularly interesting point of intersection between Pietist and kabbalist ideas, an intersection that eventually would be instrumental in shaping early modern mysticism.

I would like to thank Brigitte Bedos-Rezak and Jeffrey Hamburger not only for the organization of the colloquium but also for the overall concept, which stimulated fresh thoughts on images that I had already considered in the past. I have worked and published on several of the images discussed here in earlier contexts, but the conceptual framework of the conference stimulated a fresh look and an alternative analytical tool, and offered a new common denominator for them all. My current research on Elisha Cresques, addressed in the last part of this paper, is funded by a grant from the Israel Science Foundation, no. 122/12.