The Messianic Sanctuary in Late Fifteenth-Century Sepharad: Isaac de Braga's Bible and the Reception of Traditional Temple Imagery

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Hebrew book art flourished in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in various parts of Castile, Navarre, and the Crown of Aragon.[1] Among the manuscripts of the period we find a relatively large number of illuminated Hebrew Bibles, most of which owe a great debt to the formal repertoires of Islamic art and display a rich variety of carpet pages. Images of the Temple implements representing the future messianic Temple account for another dominant theme in the illustration programmes of these medieval Sephardi Bibles. The art in these manuscripts reflects various aspects of the cultural processes that developed within the Sephardi communities at the time, and the non-figural decoration programmes in many of them mirror cultural values rooted in the symbiosis of Jewish and Islamic culture.[2]

Sephardi book art began to decline toward the end of the fourteenth century, apparently owing to the Jews' deteriorating political and economic situation, the persecution following the Black Death of 1348–49, and the anti-Jewish riots of 1391. The economic strength of the elite, whose members would have been the patrons of the resplendent manuscripts, weakened significantly. Most of the books produced in the fifteenth century include only modest and simple decorations, and Bible manuscripts were no exception. Depictions of the Temple vessels virtually disappeared from the repertoire, and painted carpet pages from that period are very rare. More graphic methods of adornment developed as lavish

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[1] For some general background on Hebrew manuscript painting, see Joseph Gutmann, *Hebrew Manuscript Painting* (New York: Braziller, 1978); Ursula and Kurt Schubert, *Jüdische Buchkunst*, 2 vols (Graz: Akademische Druck –und Verlagsanstalt, 1983–92), I (1983); and Bezalel Narkiss, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1984 (Hebrew); rev. edn of English version, Jerusalem: Keter 1969). Specifically on Sephardi book art, see Bezalel Narkiss, Aliza Cohen-Mushlin, and Anat Tcherikover, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts in the British Isles: A Catalogue Raisonné*, I: *The Spanish and Portuguese Manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982); Katrin Kogman-Appel, *Jewish Book Art Between Islam and Christianity: The Decoration of Hebrew Bibles in Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); and Katrin Kogman-Appel, *Illuminated Haggadot from Spain: Biblical Imagery and the Passover Holiday* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

[2] Katrin Kogman-Appel, 'Hebrew Manuscript Painting in Late Medieval Spain: Signs of a Culture in Transition', *Art Bulletin*, 84 (2002), pp. 247–72; and Kogman-Appel, *Jewish Book Art*, chap. 6.

painted decoration likely became too costly for most patrons. Some books were embellished with modest painted foliate designs in the Gothic style. Like the earlier manuscripts, fifteenth-century Sephardi Bibles contain very little figurative or narrative illustration.

In this context, one Bible clearly stands out as a departure from that image of decline. In 1475/6 Don Isaac ben Solomon de Braga commissioned a particularly lavish Bible, now in Oxford (Bodleian Library, MS Kenn. 1, often referred to as the 'First Kennicott Bible').[3] Eleazar Gutwirth counters the long-held image of the continuous decline of Sephardi Jewry during the fifteenth century and describes a relatively vibrant cultural atmosphere around the middle of the century.[4] Isaac de Braga's Bible in all its splendour seems to support Gutwirth's conclusions. The somewhat unusual appearance of the illuminator's painted colophon (fol. 447^r) reveals the artist's name, Joseph ibn Haim, perhaps a relative of Abraham ibn Haim, the putative author of a Portuguese treatise on the art of manuscript illumination entitled *Libro de como se facen ad cores*.[5]

The de Braga Bible has 461 folios and is considerably larger than the average Sephardi Bible.[6] Apart from the biblical text it also includes a grammatical treatise (*Sefer Mikhlol*) by David Kimhi.[7] Kimhi's text is written in two columns throughout, shaped as arches and framed by broad margins with painted decoration and pen flourishes. Whereas some of these frames are entirely aniconic, others contain a rich variety of fauna, various grotesques, jesters with apes' faces, and so on. The latter reflect a typical Western, late medieval Gothic repertoire of motifs and forms, creating a strong contrast to the Islamic-style patterns of the aniconic decoration.

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[3]   The manuscript was described in detail with photographs of all the illuminated pages in *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. by Narkiss, Cohen-Mushlin, and Tcherikover, pp. 153–59. See also the commentary to the facsimile: Bezalel Narkiss and Aliza Cohen-Mushlin, *The Kennicott Bible*, 2 vols (London: Facsimile Editions, 1985), I: An Introduction. The manuscript contains a colophon on fol. 438^r.

[4]   Eleazar Gutwirth, 'Towards Expulsion: 1391–1492', in *Spain and the Jews: The Sephardi Experience 1492 and After*, ed. by Elie Kedourie (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), pp. 51–73.

[5]   Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS Parm. 1959, fols 1^r–20^r; on this treatise, see, most recently, António Joào Cruz and Luís Urbano Afonso, 'On the Date and Contents of a Portuguese Medieval Technical Book on Illuminatio: O livro de como se fazem as cores', *Medieval History Journal*, 11 (2008), pp. 1–28.

[6]   It measures 298 by 240 mm.

[7]   Fols 1^r–8^v and 438^v–444^r. This text is also included in the so-called *Cervera Bible* (Lisbon, Biblioteca National, MS Il. 72); the latter, as several inscriptions indicate, was kept in Corunna in the late fourteenth century and served Ibn Haim as a model for the de Braga Bible.

The biblical text begins on fol. 9ᵛ with the book of Genesis, and the Pentateuch is divided into the weekly reading portions—*parashot*. As is common in many decorated Hebrew Bibles, the *parashot* are marked in the margins with painted signs that display a rich variety of grotesques, dragons, and animals, particularly fowl. Other types of marginal decorations are also present: at the end of each book a small tablet, generally embellished with interlace patterns and pen flourishes, marks the verse count for each book, a common feature in Sephardi Bible decoration from the thirteenth century on; similar motifs appear occasionally to adorn the minute lines of the Masorah magna in the margins; on the last page of the Pentateuch we find a carpet panel the size of a text column combining, again, Islamicizing interlace forms with typical late Gothic pen flourishes in red and blue.

Two pages with Temple implements (Figs 1 and 2) and five carpet pages separate the three major sections of the Bible from one another: the Temple pages appear at the end of Deuteronomy and denote the transition from the Pentateuch (Torah) to the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) section. An additional set of carpet pages appears between the latter and the Writings (*Ketuvim*). All in all, the Writings and Prophets sections have significantly less decoration than the Pentateuch with its abundance of *parashot* markings. However, at the beginning of the first book of Kings we find an image of King David (fol. 185ʳ), and there is another figural illustration at the beginning of the book of Jonah (fol. 305ʳ).

Hence, within the context of fifteenth-century Sephardi book design the de Braga codex stands out for its lavish decoration and, notably it also breaks with the Sephardi tradition of exclusively aniconic decoration of the Bible. Yet even more significant are some of the unusual features apparent in the imagery of the Temple implements. On the one hand, this imagery attests to the reception of the earlier Sephardi tradition of the display of the Sanctuary vessels; on the other hand, however, several details indicate a shift in meaning in relation to this earlier tradition. This essay first takes a close look at how the earlier imagery developed into the later representation of the de Braga Bible. What at first sight appears to be yet another representative of a well-established Sephardi tradition is redefined here as an agent of different cultural and religious values. In order to come to grips with these shifts in meaning, let me first sketch the main characteristics of the earlier Sephardi Temple imagery.

A typical example of this earlier imagery is found in Paris (Bibliothèque nationale de France, cod. Hébr. 7), a Hebrew Bible copied in Perpignan in 1299 (Figs 3 and 4). Like many other Sephardi Bibles of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Perpignan Bible opens with a double-page image of the Temple implements. The representation focuses not on the architectural structure of the Sanctuary but on the implements, which are arrayed as

golden silhouettes on a blank background. The placement of these images on the initial pages of the codex is a clear indication that they do not refer narratively to the building of the Temple, as described in the book of Kings, or to the construction of the desert Tabernacle, recounted in Exodus. Rather, it signals that the Bible as such was conceived as a 'Minor Temple'.[8]

All the major implements are shown and their functions are easily understood; most of the utensils are identified by captions, and their arrangement more or less reflects the order in which they are described in the biblical description of the desert Tabernacle. These earlier portrayals are also very clear in the way they convey the message of this imagery as referring to the messianic future Temple that 'God willing, will be built soon, in our days', as we read in the framing inscription of the Perpignan depiction. The addition of the Mount of Olives, based on the vision of Zechariah (Zech. 14. 3–4) in such later examples as a Bible in London (British Library, MS Harley 1528, Fig. 5) also emphasizes this point.

At first sight the de Braga Temple composition seems to be just the same: a somewhat stylized, rather abstract reference to the Temple communicating a whole set of meanings that the patrons of the earlier examples had attached to the Sanctuary. The implements are concentrated on the left side of what appears to be a double-page composition; on the right page we find the menorah (Figs 1–2). Taking a second look, however, we realize that these two pages do not evidence the beautiful unifying compositional system that all the other Sephardi representations share. In comparison to the clearly articulated, neatly outlined imagery of the earlier examples, the Temple image in the de Braga codex looks eclectic and somewhat disorganized. The menorah against the background of the filigree design is not integrated into the Temple composition and seems to stand on its own. A lion is crouching at the feet of the menorah, an unusual depiction in the Sephardi tradition. Most striking, finally, is the location of the double-page opening within the book: whereas in the Perpignan Bible and all the other earlier Bibles the Temple pages open the book, in the de Braga Bible they were placed after the Pentateuch. As noted earlier, the position of these pages in Sephardi Bibles was part of the overall communication of the Temple theme, so the significance of the location of the Temple image elsewhere in the book should not be overlooked.

In the details, too, the Temple image in the de Braga Bible also diverges markedly from the early tradition. The Ark follows a common depiction found in other Sephardi Bibles, but instead of the cherubim we find the Ark topped with a floral design. The

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8   For more background, see Kogman-Appel, *Jewish Book Art,* p. 83.

cherubim, quite disturbingly, hover above the showbread table. The trumpets from the book of Numbers in other Sephardi Temple images appear here as shovels with long handles. The objects between the hooked forks on the far left and the showbread table seem to reflect the incense shovels of the earlier renderings, but both their appearance and function were misunderstood. Other shovels, of more logical design, appear beneath these objects. Also strange is the appearance of the altars; to the left is a stepped altar with some architectural features at its front; to the right, in lieu of the usual cube-shaped golden altar, we find another stepped object. The latter does not really look like an altar but rather resembles the *even* ('stone'), a stepped object that in other representations is one of a pair flanking the menorah. In the de Braga panel it is misplaced and seems out of context. There is only one rod, apparently blooming, although the floral motif above the Ark might be hinting at the efflorescent rod; again, the full iconographic meaning of the rod has lost its clarity. It seems as though Joseph ibn Haim, the creator of this image, abstracted the implements into a single symbol. Detaching every implement from its original meaning, he bound all of them together into one symbolic image sign. The fact that all the implements are concentrated on one page against a uniform blue background with a decorative frame adds coherence and further enhances this feature.

On the one hand, the de Braga representation adheres to the Sephardi tradition and uses a similar compositional approach. On the other hand, it seems to reflect a lack of basic understanding of the iconographic components of that tradition or, at least, does not seem to grant them the importance apparent in the earlier interpretations. Instead of depicting an array of carefully chosen implements as iconographic components of an overall meaningful composition, Joseph ibn Haim presented, instead, an abridged version, a sort of one-page stamp, a symbolic extract of the original compositions. Moreover, in singling out the menorah, he seems to have given it a meaning different from what the average Sephardi viewer would associate with that implement as an integral component of the common Temple imagery. Finally, the unusual placement of the Temple implement images within the manuscript alerts us to the fact that the overall arrangement implies a shift in meaning.

In the earlier Sephardi tradition the Temple images with their clearly articulated compositional outline represent the Temple of the messianic era.[9] Many of the iconographic

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[9]   Many scholars have elaborated on the meaning of these representations as references to the future messianic Temple; for the more recent discussions, with references to the earlier literature, see Elisabeth Revel-Neher, *Le Témoignage de l'absence: Les objets du sanctuaire à Byzance et dans l'art juif du XIe au XV siècle* (Paris: De Boccard, 1998).

details of these miniatures can be fully understood only in light of Maimonides's (Moses ben Maimon, d. 1204) elaborate descriptions of and comments on the Temple and its implements.[10] Maimonides's extensive discussions of the Temple and its parts were tied to his expectation of the future messianic Sanctuary. According to the rationalistic world-view that Maimonides represented, the messianic era was expected to be a time of liberation from bondage and restoration of a Jewish state, where one would be able to fulfil all of the 613 precepts.[11] Samuel, a third-century Talmudic scholar, wrote: 'There is no difference between this world and the world to come, except the liberation from bondage',[12] and Sephardi rationalist expectations of the messianic era were in line with this notion. It was expected that the Temple would be rebuilt in the messianic era and that sacrificial worship would be resumed. In Maimonides's words, 'He [the Messiah] will rebuild the Sanctuary and gather the dispersed of Israel. […] Sacrifices will be again offered'.[13]

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[10]   For a full discussion of these images vis-à-vis Maimonides's comments, see Kogman-Appel, *Jewish Book Art*, chap. 4; for an alternative interpretation relating the images of the fourteenth century to the teachings of Nahmanides, see Eva Frojmovic, 'Messianic Politics in Re-Christianized Spain: Images of the Sanctuary in Hebrew Bible Manuscripts', in *Imagining the Self, Imagining the Other*, ed. by Eva Frojmovic (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 91–128.

[11]   Much has been written about Maimonides's approach to messianism and only selected literature can be listed here: Gershom Scholem, 'Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism', in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), pp. 35–53; David Hartman, 'Maimonides' Approach to Messianism and Its Contemporary Implications', *Da'at*, 2–3 (1978–79), pp. 5–33 (Hebrew); Joel L. Kraemer, 'On Maimonides' Messianic Posture', in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature,* ed. by Isidore Twersky, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979–2000), II (1984), pp. 109–42; Aryeh Botwinick, 'Maimonides' Messianic Age', *Judaism*, 33 (1984), pp. 418–25; and Aviezer Ravitzky, 'To the Utmost of Human Capacity': Maimondes on the Days of the Messiah', in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. by Joel L. Kraemer (Oxford: Oxford University Press for The Littman Library, 1991), pp. 221–56. Ravitzky criticizes earlier scholarship for focussing primarily on the restorative aspects of the Maimonidean concept and argues that Maimonides also presented a second, more utopian model of the universal salvation of mankind. Dov Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1997): chap. 3 (Hebrew). For the status of the law in messianic times, see also Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought: Studies in Ethics, Law, and the Human Ideal* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), chap. 1 (pp. 28–29 on the Messiah).

[12]   Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 34b.

[13]   Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh torah hu ha-yad ha-hazaqa lerabbenu Moshe ben Maimon* (Jerusalem: R. Kook Institute, 1957), *Sefer Hashoftim: Hilkhot melakhim umilhamot*, 11:1; for an English version, see *The Code of Maimonides*, XIV: *The Book of Judges*, trans. by Abraham M. Hershman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 238.

Maimonides began his *Book of Temple Service* (*Sefer Avodah*), the eighth book of the *Mishne Torah*, with some general thoughts about the construction of the Tabernacle and the Temple. In this context he wrote:

> The Temple building erected by Solomon is clearly described in the Book of Kings. Furthermore, the building to be erected in the future, even though it is discussed in the Book of Ezekiel, is not fully described and defined therein. Therefore, those who built the Second Temple in the days of Ezra followed the pattern of Solomon's Temple and adapted some of the particulars described in Ezekiel.[14]

This idea and the explicit mention of the future Temple *to be built* as an earthly structure correspond to the plan-like compositions in the early Sephardi Bibles. The ultimate end of the messianic scenario as envisioned by Maimonides was the personal salvation of each individual, in the sense of the 'personal, eternal, and separate survival of the soul'.[15] This rational approach to messianism superseded and challenged the earlier apocalyptic views of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages and was prevalent among Sephardi Jews during the lifetime of Maimonides. Explaining his stance toward apocalyptic scenarios of the end of time Maimonides wrote:

> Do not think that the Messiah needs to perform signs and wonders, bring anything new into being, revive the dead, or do similar things […] Let no one think that in the days of the Messiah any of the laws of nature will be set aside, or any innovation be introduced into creation. The world will follow its normal course.[16]

As influential as the Maimonidean rational worldview was—many Sephardi thinkers of the later Middle Ages adhered to it, some of them radically—soon after Maimonides's

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[14] Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Sefer ha'avodah*, *beth habehira* 1:4, for an English version, see *The Code of Maimonides,* VIII: *The Book of Temple Services*, trans. by Mendell Lewittes (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 5.

[15] Schwartz, *Messianism*, pp. 46–47, and chap. 3; see also Ravitzky, 'Maimonides on the Days of the Messiah'.

[16] Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Sefer shoftim, hilkhot melakhim umilhamot*, 11:3–12:1, *Code of Maimonides,* XIV, trans. Abraham Hershman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1949), 239–40.

death in 1204 it became the core of a fierce controversy that was to shake Sephardi culture for almost two hundred years.[17] The messianic concept that shines so eloquently through the imagery of the Perpignan Bible did not remain static.

In contrast to the Maimonidean concept of the Temple to be built to facilitate perfect observation of divine law, including the sacrificial services, the apocalyptic approach envisioned messianic salvation of a public, national nature, with the messianic era being introduced by dramatic events, miracles and signs from above, eschatological catastrophes, and messianic wars, leading to a new world in which the halakhic law would no longer be needed. Among other legends, myths about the messianic beasts to be served to the righteous at the messianic banquet were also part of these views. According to this scenario, the Temple would not be rebuilt by human hands: the heavenly Sanctuary would descend to Jerusalem as the Lord's dwelling place but not necessarily for the sake of the restoration of the sacrificial cult. Whereas the Maimonidean concept influenced most Sephardi visual renderings of the Temple, Sarit Shalev-Eyni demonstrates that the apocalyptic scenario was dominant in Ashkenazi culture during and for some time after the Maimonidean period.[18]

By and large Sephardi scholars remained faithful to the Maimonidean idea that the messianic Temple would be built physically at the initiative of the Messiah. Sephardi thinkers never went so far as to fully adopt the notion of the Temple descending from above, which was alien to their conception of future events, no matter how far some of them departed from the Maimonidean concept.[19] In fact, the adoption of the traditional Temple imagery, even if reduced to a stylized symbol-sign in the de Braga Bible, makes that point pretty clear, but to varying degrees Sephardi messianic expectations did embrace elements typical of the apocalyptic view. In what follows, I take a closer look at the directions the Sephardi messianic concepts took between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries and try to

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[17] A recent discussion of Maimonideanism with references to the earlier literature can be found in *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought,* ed. by James T. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

[18] Sarit Shalev-Eyni, 'Jerusalem and the Temple in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts: Jewish Thought and Christian Influence', in *L'Interculturalità dell'ebraismo: Atti del convegno internazionale Bertinoro-Ravenna*, ed. by Mauro Perani (Ravenna: Longo, 2004), pp. 173–91.

[19] For details, see Schwartz, *Messianism*, chaps 4–6; on late medieval Sephardi messianism, see also Eric Lawee, '"Israel Has No Messiah" in Late Medieval Spain', *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 5 (1996), pp. 245–79.

determine whether the nature of those approaches can explain the divergences of the de Braga imagery from that of the Sephardi Temple tradition.

Let me first consider the menorah and its meaning as an independent symbol. It was, in fact, the menorah that appeared as the first iconographic formula related to the Temple in Late Antiquity. During the reign of Mattathias Antigonos (37–40 BCE), coins were minted showing the menorah on one face and the showbread table on the other. Thus it appears that while the Temple was still standing the menorah was one of its principal symbols, and the fact that it adorned a coin granted it political meaning beyond any religious significance. After the Jews lost their independence during the two revolts against the Romans, in 70 CE when the Temple was destroyed and in 135 CE when the Bar Kokhba revolt was suppressed, the menorah gradually became an independent symbol. It not only began to appear as part of an array of Temple implements, as in the mosaic pavements of many synagogues,[20] but also served as an emblem of Jewish identity, for example on tombstones in Roman burial sites.[21] Together with other Temple motifs, the menorah always bore eschatological meaning, but, unlike other messianic symbols, it evolved specifically into a sign of national, religious, and cultural identity, soon became generally recognized as such, and was found all over the Jewish world.[22] If the menorah was intended to continue to carry the national meaning it acquired in Late Antiquity, it would imply that in the de Braga image the Temple took on certain national or political undertones. It is possible that in singling out the menorah, Joseph ibn Haim meant to introduce that national-political aspect.

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[20] For a contribution by Bianca Kühnel on the floor mosaics, see 'Jewish and Christian Art in the Middle Ages: The Dynamics of a Relationship', in *Juden und Christen zur Zeit der Kreuzzüge*, ed. by Alfred Haverkamp (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1999), pp. 1–16, challenging the notion of an iconographic chain that was governing the discourse on these images at the time; see also Gustav Kühnel, 'Gemeinsame Kunstsprache und rivalisierende Ikonographie: Jüdische und christliche Kunst in Galiläa vom 4.–7. Jahrhundert', *Oriens Christianus*, 79 (1995), pp. 197–223; in general on the eschatological meaning of the floor mosaics depicting the Temple, see Elisabeth Revel-Neher, *L'Arche d'alliance dans l'art juif et chrétien du second au dixième siècles: Le signe de la rencontre* (Paris: Association des amis des études archéologiques byzantino-slaves et du christianisme oriental, 1984), pp. 75–130.

[21] Lihi Habas, 'Identity and Hope: The Menorah in the Jewish Catacombs in Rome', in *In the Light of the Menorah: Story of a Symbol*, ed. by Yael Israeli (Jerusalem: Israel Museum; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999), pp. 69–72 (Hebrew); Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chap. 10.

[22] Lee I. Levine, 'The Menorah in the Ancient Synagogue', in *In the Light of the Menorah*, ed. by Israeli, pp. 99–101 (Hebrew), 109–12.

This notion finds support in the lion, the symbol of the royal tribe of Judah, crouching at the feet of the menorah. The lion as a symbol stands for royal leadership in messianic times.[23] In post-70 CE late antique Judaism, with the Land of Israel recently conquered by the Romans, the lion with its political implications had a well-defined *Sitz im Leben* and appeared frequently in the art of that period.[24] This connotation was rare in the Middle Ages and later periods, however, when the lion or the pair of lions became a motif associated primarily with the Torah shrine in the synagogue. With one exception from early fourteenth-century Regensburg in Bavaria, there are no lions in medieval pictorial renderings of the Temple.[25] The emphasis on the national aspect of messianic expectations is absent from the other Sephardi Temple images with their close link to the Maimonidean concept of the individual salvation of the soul.

The accent on the national aspects of the messianic scenario can be understood as an echo of the challenges to the Maimonidean concept and to the original iconographic formula of the messianic Temple as it was visualized in the Perpignan Bible (Figs 3–4). Both the rational and the apocalyptic views of messianic times had certain political-national connotations and underscored the expectation that political independence would be re-established. However, there are significant differences between the two views in regard to the particulars of these political aspirations. The apocalyptic approach implied a whole range of politically charged events in a highly dramatic setting. At its centre were messianic wars leading to the liberation of the people of Israel from foreign bondage and the Land of Israel from Christian domination. Holders of apocalyptic views tended to link contemporary political developments, such as the crusades (negatively) or the Mongol conquest (positively), to the anticipated messianic events.[26] In this context the liberation from bondage, understood as a triumphant defeat of Edom-Christianity, could thus have taken on a political

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[23] Revel-Neher, *L'Arche d'alliance*, p. 103.

[24] Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), pp. 321–28.

[25] For a discussion of this image, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, 'Sephardic Ideas in Ashkenaz: Visualizing the Temple in Medieval Regensburg', in 'Science and Philosophy in Ashkenazi Culture: Rejection, Toleration, and Appropriation', ed. by Gad Freudenthal, *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* / Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook, 8 (2009), pp. 245–77.

[26] Israel Jacob Yuval, 'Jewish Messianic Expectations towards 1240 and Christian Reactions', in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. by Peter Schäfer and Mark R. Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 105–21.

dimension.[27] In the reality of deteriorating political circumstances from the middle of the fourteenth century, on the one hand, and the fall of Byzantine Constantinople in 1453, on the other, messianic expectations of the apocalyptic sort became more and more dominant among Sephardi Jews.

The Maimonidean concept was different. On the one hand it implied that Israel's liberation from foreign bondage and the restoration of Jewish independence were preconditions for the messianic era to begin; on the other, the rational approach envisioned the messianic future in terms of personal salvation. Redemption would take place within history and within the framework of the natural order. Scholars have pointed out that Maimonides never made a clear statement about the particulars of the restoration of the Jewish state as a precondition for the messianic scenario. In his analysis of Maimonides's political thought, Gerald Blidstein pinpoints the elements that led to an understanding of the national and political aspects of Maimonidean messianism.[28] According to his observations, the restoration of a Jewish state was not a goal; it was, rather, a means to secure the complete fulfilment of divine law, the rebuilding of the Temple, and the re-establishment of the sacrificial services. Political restoration under the leadership of a messianic figure would be less a sign of political or military power than a mark of the validity of this very leader as the Messiah. The messianic figure would be militarily successful and provide for the wealth and political stability of the people about to be redeemed.[29]

Political stability also implied the tenure of judges in order to promote a functioning society of righteous individuals. Even though the ultimate goal of redemption would be the survival of the individual soul, the existence of a healthy communal society was among the

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[27] For the understanding of Edom as Rome and, consequently, Christianity, see Rashi on Numbers 24. 19; for more background, see Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. by Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), chap. 1.

[28] Ya'akov (Gerald) J. Blidstein, *Political Principles in the Teachings of Maimonides* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2001), chap. 10, with references to the earlier literature, esp. in notes 1–2 (Hebrew); see also Amos Funkenstein, 'Maimonides: Political Theory and Realistic Messianism', in *Die Mächte des Guten und Bösen: Vorstellungen im XII. u. XIII. Jh. über ihr Wirken in d. Heilgeschichte*, ed. by Albert Zimmermann, Miscellanea Mediaevalia, 11 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970), pp. 81–103. On Maimonides's political thought, see also Aviezer Ravitzky, *Religion and State in Jewish Philosophy: Models of Unity, Division, Collision, and Subordination* (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2002).

[29] See, e.g., Maimonides's *Epistle to the Yemenite Community*; Blidstein, *Political Principles*, p. 265.

preconditions for the re-establishment of a full Jewish life in the Land of Israel.[30] The most crucial precondition for restoration and redemption, and a goal in itself (not a means), was repentance.[31] Speaking of political restoration as a *means* to advance the messianic era, rather than a messianic *goal* in itself, does not seem to call for the kind of visual emphasis on political power (offered by the menorah and the lion) that we find in the Temple imagery of the de Braga Bible.

Among the moderate followers of the Maimonidean world-view was Menachem Hameiri of Perpignan (d. *c*. 1310). His messianic concept also focused on the survival of the soul, the eternity of Halakhah, and political liberation as a means and not as a goal. Knowing that Hameiri was the communal leader of Perpignan at the time the Perpignan Bible was produced there sheds some light on how its imagery was both conceived and received by its patron. Hameiri wrote about the rebuilt Temple, where the redeemed would be able to reach a state of perfect wisdom.[32]

The realities of the thirteenth century and, even more, of the fourteenth push yet another aspect to the forefront of the discussion of messianic expectations and any possible political implications. The confrontation with Christianity and the challenges Jewish scholars faced in public disputes added a polemical element to considerations of the messianic future. The notion of divine vengeance began to shape the political aspects of Sephardi messianic concepts, with a focus on the destruction of the Temple. The political implications of the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans, who, as noted, were identified with Edom and eventually equated with Christianity, were crucial, and it appears that these implications not only influenced the imagery of the de Braga Bible as such but may also have determined the arrangements within the book.

The reduction of the Temple imagery to a symbol-sign that refers only to the idea of the Temple as a whole, rather than to the particular function of each vessel so carefully laid out by Maimonides and faithfully accounted for in the visualizations of the Perpignan Bible, seems to reflect the way the Sephardi messianic concept changed between the late twelfth and the early fourteenth centuries. The separation of the menorah from the overall compositional framework and its apparent political meaning fit well into this context.

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[30] See the definition of a communal society in Maimonides's *Commentary to the Mishna, Perush a Mishnah, Horayot*, 1:1, for details, see Blidstein, *Political Principles*, p. 272. This was also voiced prior to Maimonides; see, e.g., the discussion of Judah Halevi's approach in Schwartz, *Messianism*, pp. 61–62.

[31] For details, see Blidstein, *Political Principles*, pp. 272–74.

[32] *Perush le-sefer Tehilim*, ed. by Yosef H. Hakohen (Jerusalem: Mekitse Nirdamim, 1936), pp. 163–64.

The scholar primarily responsible for developing these ideas was Moses ben Nahman, commonly known as Nahmanides (d. 1270), who discussed messianic expectations extensively and ultimately concluded that the Messiah would arrive in 1358. Driven by his views, Nahmanides, who eventually moved to the Land of Israel, is also well known for his historical approach to the interpretation of the biblical narrative, an approach that modern scholars have defined as Jewish typology.[33] According to Nahmanides Jewish history is a process that will eventually lead to the goal of repairing the nation.[34] National restoration will not be complete until the ten lost tribes return to the Land of Israel. Only then can political and religious life be fully restored.

Discussing messianic expectations and the restoration of a Jewish state within a clearly defined historical framework also allowed Nahmanides to confront Christian claims. One question that came up time and again in his dealings with the messianic future concerned the nature of biblical prophecies and whether these referred to historical events that had already taken place (such as the destruction of the First Temple and the building of the Second), or whether they addressed the future messianic scenario, in which there seems to be a shift concerning the role of the Temple. Whereas the Maimonidean concept assigned the Temple primarily a function within the framework of the eternity of Halakhah, guaranteeing complete fulfilment of divine law, including the sacrificial services, Nahmanides wrote of the Temple's role as an agent of prophetic truth. And it plays this part in the drama of his confrontation with Christianity. His interest in the Temple also highlighted the political implications and the changing role of political restoration within the messianic concept.

Nahmanides's writings also offer a key to understanding the unusual placement of the Temple image in the de Braga Bible. As noted, in the typical layout of traditional Sephardi Bibles the Temple image appears at the beginning of the manuscript to emphasize the Bible's function as a 'Minor Temple'. The designers of the decoration programme of the de Braga Bible broke with this clearly laid-out and balanced concept of the Bible as a 'Minor Temple'

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[33] For a discussion of the impact of 'Jewish typology' on the imagery of Sephardi Haggadot, see Kogman-Appel, *Illuminated Haggadot*, chap. 7; on Jewish typology, see Amos Funkenstein, 'Nachmanides' Symbolical Reading of History', in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism: Proceedings of Regional Conferences Held at the University of California, Los Angeles, and McGill University in April, 1978*, ed. by Joseph Dan and Frank Talmadge (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies,1982), pp. 129–50.

[34] For further background on Nahmanides's concept, see Nina Caputo, *Nahmanides in Medieval Catalonia: History, Community, and Messianism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), including p. 131 on the repair of the nation, with further references.

and the future Third Temple as a messianic agent ensuring the eternity of the Halakhah. Rather, as I noted earlier, in the de Braga manuscript the Temple image with its enhanced political implications appears at the end of the Pentateuch. From the point of view of biblical chronology the transition from the book of Deuteronomy to that of Joshua marks the entrance of the Children of Israel into the Promised Land, a journey that ultimately brought the Ark of the Covenant to its final dwelling place, Jerusalem, where the Temple was built once royal leadership governed.[35]

Moreover, the placement of the image at the end of the book of Deuteronomy suggests yet another point of view. The very last section of Deuteronomy includes the Song of Moses (*shirat ha'azinu*), which concludes Moses's final address to the people before he retired to Mount Nebo to meet his death. This final speech is basically a prophecy of exile as punishment for Israel's sins, a warning at the entrance to the Promised Land that it will be lost in the future (Deut. 30–32): "I declare unto you this day, that you shall surely perish, you shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither you pass over the Jordan to go on to possess it (30. 18)."[36] God will punish the people, but in the end, he will avenge them and destroy Israel's enemies (32. 35–43):

> Vengeance is mine, and recompense against the time when their foot shall slip;
> for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that are to come upon them
> shall make haste. For the Lord will judge His people, and repent Himself for his
> servants; [...] if I whet my glittering sword, and my hand takes hold on judgement,
> I will render vengeance to my adversaries and will recompense them that hate me
> [...] sing aloud, O you nations, of is people; for He does avenge the blood of His
> servants, and does render vengeance to His adversaries, and does make expiation
> for the land of this people.

Nahmanides, in his commentary on the Pentateuch, addresses the question of whether these verses refer to the future redemption or the building of the Second Temple, and insists:

> And it is clear, that He assures [Israel] concerning the future redemption, for

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during the construction of the Second Temple, the nations did not rejoice with His people (verse 43), but mocked them: 'What are these feeble Jews doing? (Neh 3. 34)" And their leaders were servants in the palace of the king of Babylon and all the Jews were subject to him. In those days He did not render vengeance to His adversaries and He did not make expiation for the land of His people.[37]

In his *Book of Redemption* (*Sefer Hage'ulah*) Nahmanides elaborated on this statement:

In that Song (of *Ha'azinu*), which is 'our true and faithful witness (Jer. 42. 5)', He foretold all the evils which befall us in the [present] exile, such as 'I thought I would make an end of them, I would make their memory cease from among them (Deut. 32. 26)'. However at the end [of that Song], he assured us, 'for the Eternal will judge his people, and for His servants He will reconsider (Deut. 32. 36)'. Similarly, 'sing aloud, O ye nations, of His people; for He does avenge the blood of His servants and does render vengeance to His adversaries and does make expiation for the Land of His people [see above]'. This is a prophecy of the future and is not one of the conditions of the exhortations; it is destined to occur despite the will [of the apostates]. We have not seen [it come to pass] that the men of the Second Temple were rejoiced by the nations. Instead, [the nations] derided them with all sorts of scorn and shame, similar to the statement, 'what are these feeble Jews doing?' Our God did not 'render vengeance to His adversaries at that time or make expiation for the Land of His people', for the Divine Glory did not dwell with them in [the era of] the Second Temple.[38]

Elsewhere in the same book Nahmanides added that since only two tribes returned to the Land of Israel after the Babylonian exile, prophecies about the building of the Temple for all the tribes cannot refer to the Second Temple.[39] Nina Caputo argues that these statements are part

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[37] Nahmanides, *Perush ha-Ramban: Al ha-Torah*, Deuteronomy 32. 40, ed. by Haim (Charles) B. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1962); for the English translation, see *Commentary on the Torah*, trans. and notes by Charles B. Chavel, 5 vols (New York: Shilo, 1971–76).

[38] *Sefer Hage'ulah*, 1; for the English version, see Ramban (Nahmanides), *Writings and Discourses*, trans. and notes by Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo, 1978), II (Book of Redemption), p. 13. For biblical citations, see above, note 35.

[39] Ramban, *Writings and Discourses*, trans. by Chavel, pp. 33–34.

of a polemical dialogue with Christianity on the meaning of the prophecies voiced in the Song of Moses.[40]

Throughout the entire *Book of Redemption* the principal focus is on the political liberation of the Children of Israel. Nahmanides's reading of the Song of Moses as referring not to the building of the Second Temple but rather to the future messianic scenario can explain the placement of the Temple image in the de Braga Bible at the junction between Deuteronomy and Joshua. The biblical text itself does not refer to the Temple or its destruction; it is Nahmanides who creates that link. Moreover, his explanation touches on the nature of divine vengeance, a political motif of the apocalyptic scenario that was introduced into the Sephardi concept as a by-product of anti-Maimonidean critique.

In conclusion, as much as the Temple imagery of the Perpignan Bible adheres to the Maimonidean concept of messianic expectations in general and the role of the future Temple within the framework of these expectations in particular (perhaps through the lens of Menachem Hameiri), the imagery of the Temple in the de Braga Bible seems to be a divergence. Even though faithful to the plan-like structure of the earlier Sephardi tradition, the de Braga composition reduces this imagery to an eclectic presentation of implements, void of their logical functions as they were clearly communicated in the earlier exponents and as they would fit into the framework of rationalist expectations regarding the future Temple.

As a by-product of the challenges posited by anti-Maimonidean criticism, the Sephardi messianic concept received a political dimension. Figuring the menorah as an independent symbol detached from the overall composition of the Temple imagery and with the representation of a lion at its feet added that political dimension and imbued the abbreviated symbol-sign with additional meaning. Hence the de Braga Temple representation demonstrates that as much as apocalyptic elements were able to shape later Sephardi ideas, in one respect the Sephardi approaches remained faithful to the Maimonidean concept: the rebuilding of the Temple by human hands for the sake of the restoration of the sacrificial service as part of the eternal divine law.

As an additional interpretive layer we can add Nahmanides's understanding of the Song of Moses with its reference to the future Temple rather than to the Second Commonwealth (as implied in Christian exegesis). The placement of the Temple image at the meaningful junction where the Children of Israel enter the Promised Land might have turned into a polemical tool in the confrontation with Christianity. Scholars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, dealing

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[40]   Caputo, *Nahmanides,* chap. 4.

with the historical memories of the persecution during the plague year and those of 1391 and also, eventually, the hopes that were raised by the fall of Constantinople in 1453, developed this concept even further. In their writings, these scholars added extra impetus to the direction those ideas would take at the end of the fifteenth century (around the time the de Braga Bible was illuminated, or some years later), and this was the line taken by Isaac Abarbanel in his *Commentary to the Pentateuch*, where he adopted and elaborated on Nahmanides's interpretation.[41]

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[41] *Perush al ha-Torah, Devarim*, Deut. 32. The commentary to Deuteronomy was begun prior to Abarbanel's expulsion from Iberia and completed after his move to Italy. Scholars have pointed to the ways Abarbanel coped with the trauma of the expulsion in his writings, which also had implications for his messianic concept. For more on Abarbanel's messianism, see Schwartz, *Messianism*, chap. 7; and Eric Lawee, 'The Messianism of Isaac Abarbanel, "Father of the [Jewish] Messianic Movements of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries"', in *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, 4 vols, I: *Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World,* ed. by Matt D. Goldish and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), pp. 1–39.