

## CHAPTER FOUR

### WITHIN THE CULTURAL MILIEU: THE SCRIBE'S ARTISTIC SOURCES

#### THE DECORATION PLAN

Ashkenazi illuminated maḥzorim produced in the thirteenth century are characterized by expanded initial full-page panels that are frequently illustrations of the text. Sefardi maḥzorim, on the other hand, are usually decorated with filigree pen-work or colorful zoomorphic and anthropomorphic letters, and their initial-word panels are not big. Unfortunately, the few surviving decorated Sefardi maḥzorim do not yield enough information to identify the decoration plan for such manuscripts in the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>1</sup> Art historians generally focus on illuminated exemplars and their elaborate panels, but in the case of the *Catalan Micrography Maḥzor* the two initial-word panels, although they are done in color and with gold, are minor secondary components of its decoration program.<sup>2</sup> Its principal decoration plan is the micrography, a Jewish “marginal art,” so to speak, generally found only in Hebrew Bibles. As it is a maḥzor and not a Bible, the *Maḥzor's* complex micrography decorations render it unique among extant Sefardi maḥzorim manuscripts.

The micrography decoration plan comprises two components: The first includes thirty-six micrography decorations found in the outer margins of the *piyyuṭim* texts, which include a geometric guilloche design on fol. 38v, a composite marginal decoration consisting of animals on fol. 85v, and thirty-four candelabra trees, of which four are inhabited by birds as are four scroll designs. These outer-margin decorations generally adorn an opening,<sup>3</sup> and, as I indicated in Chapter 3, they decorate major liturgical stations, thus serving as “book marks” of a sort.

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<sup>1</sup> On illuminated Ashkenazi maḥzorim manuscripts, see Sed-Rajna (1983). On specific volumes, see the most recent research on the *Leipzig Maḥzor* by Katrin Kogman-Appel (2012). On the Tripartite Maḥzor see Shalev-Eyni (2010), and Shalev-Eyni (2001).

<sup>2</sup> Fols. 15v and 47v. The two initial-word panels include alternating magenta and blue backgrounds, checkered with purple and red squares with white circles at their edges and titles written in gold letters. See pl. XIII and fig. 56.

<sup>3</sup> The candelabra trees appear on fols. 18r/17v, 20r/19v, 30r/29v, 32r/31v, 35r/34v, 36r/35v, 38r/37v, 48r/47v, 64r/63v, 65v, 70r, 74r/73v, 76r/75v, 80r/79v, 94r/93v, 97v, and 123r. Birds

The second and most important decoration plan element in the *Catalan Micrography Maḥzor* is, of course, the twenty-three full-page micrography panels, set in two quires at the beginning of the manuscript. These pages reflect a vast array of motifs: a plethora of birds, deer, dogs, and dragons, a monkey, a griffin, several human figures, hybrids, vine scrolls, and the typical Sefardi Bible decoration component of a Temple Implement opening.

As I noted earlier, micrography decorations are common in Bible manuscripts, but the only non-Bible manuscripts decorated in this way known to date apart from this *Maḥzor* are two fourteenth-century haggadot from the Iberian Peninsula. That being so, the *Maḥzor* is indeed unique.<sup>4</sup> The forming text in Bible manuscripts is the Masorah *magna*, whereas in the *Maḥzor* it generally comes from Psalms.<sup>5</sup> Further, apart from the micrography, other decorative elements typical of Bible manuscripts are found in the *Maḥzor*: carpet pages, common in Oriental and Sefardi Bibles; Temple Implement pages; and candelabra trees.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the full-page decorations in the *Maḥzor* constitute a narrative cycle preceding the manuscript's text, which is another unique element, as narrative cycles are characteristic and generally limited to fourteenth-century Sefardi haggadot.<sup>7</sup>

#### THE SCRIBE'S ARTISTIC SOURCES

Hebrew manuscripts are very similar in style and iconographic motifs to the manuscripts that were created by artists in the majority society in which they lived. Thus my basic assumption as I pursued this research was that the various images in the *Maḥzor* derive from the repertoire of motifs in Jewish Sefardi art together with borrowed elements from the Iberian milieu, based on both Islamic and Gothic sources.

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inhabit the candelabra trees on fols. 18r, 36r, 80r/79v, and 97v. The four scrolls are on fols. 16r/15v and 26r/25v.

<sup>4</sup> The two manuscripts are the *Mocatta Haggadah* and the *Rylands Haggadah*.

<sup>5</sup> On the nine places in the *Maḥzor* where the decoration's forming texts are not psalms, see Chapter 3, pp. 58–59.

<sup>6</sup> Carpet pages are found on fols. 4v, 9r, and 9v. The Temple Implement pages are on fols. 12r/11v. For the distribution of candelabra trees throughout the *Maḥzor* see n. 3.

<sup>7</sup> These extensive illustration cycles revolve around Scripture and begin either with the creation of the world or the birth of Moses. The most comprehensive work on these cycles is to be found in Kogman-Appel (2006). The cycle of micrography panels is discussed in Chapter 6, which focuses on the interpretation of these illustrations.