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## **Feasting at the Lord's Table**

Eva Frojmovic

### **BIO**

Eva Frojmovic teaches art history, Jewish culture and medieval Jewish–Christian relations at the University of Leeds. Before moving to Leeds, she earned her MA from the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität in Freiburg, her PhD from the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, and worked as a Frances Yates postdoctoral fellow at the Warburg Institute in London. Her published research has concerned medieval and early modern Jewish visualities and Christian representations of Jews, as well as the author Francesco da Barberino. She is completing a book about Hebrew illuminated manuscripts from the 1230s. Her other research projects concern the post-1348 reuse of Jewish tombstones, and the politics of display of medieval Judaica in regional and civic history museums.

### **ABSTRACT**

The miniature of the eschatological banquet of the Just in paradise pictured at the end of the Ambrosian Bible is read here through the lens of a cultural history or *histoire des mentalités*. The banquet motif is interpreted as a symbolic representation of transcendent order, by means of a bricolage of preexisting images and iconographies of social order. Ultimately, the eschatological setting of the aristocratic banquet involves a polemical critique of a society that excluded Jews, and a vision of the courtly, exclusionary hierarchies of aristocratic Europe subverted.

The illuminator of the thirteenth-century Hebrew manuscript known as the Ambrosian

Bible (1236–1238) appears to have committed an “iconographical error”—one that raises wider questions of how medieval viewers interpreted the images in illuminated manuscripts. The supposed error is this: according to ancient legend, the Righteous attending a feast in the afterlife are to dine on the giant fish Leviathan, but in a miniature depicting the banquet, chicken appears in the bowls (fig. 1). This miniature is usually interpreted through source text(s), or by “explaining” it as “influenced” by Christian compositions. Beyond its possible textual and visual sources, this “iconographical mistake” draws our attention to the ideological and cultural context of this image. I argue for a reading in terms of a complex cultural history involving a multi-layered relationship with Christian and secular cultures, whose result is an image that encodes an eschatological utopia by means of the theme of the aristocratic banquet. The composition may reference images of the Last Supper, but it also refers to secular banquets attended by the nobility, which represented a fragile, ideal social order. But of course, in the case of the Jewish messianic banquet, there is a “twist,” and this banquet scene in the Ambrosian Bible, as secular as it looks, is not secular. I argue that it encodes an ideal social order that symbolizes a messianic-utopian re-ordering of society, in which righteous Jews will be (like) kings.

The three-volume Ambrosian Bible, copied in South Germany by the scribe Jacob b. Samuel and the vocalizer/masorator Joseph ben Kalonymos for Joseph ben Moses of Ulm in 1236–38, is a large-format masoretic Hebrew Bible containing the twenty-four biblical books, a verse-by-verse Aramaic paraphrase (Targum), and the masorah parva and magna.<sup>1</sup>

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I would like to thank Vivian Mann and the anonymous reviewers of my article.

<sup>1</sup> Milan, Ambrosian Library, Ms. B 30-32 inf. 453 x 344 mm. B 30 inf. (Pentateuch): 222 folios; B 31 inf. (Prophets): 208 folios; B32 inf. (Hagiographa): 136 folios. The scribe’s colophon in B 30 inf. fol. 222v, i.e. at the end of the Pentateuch, names the patron and the date 1 Shevat 996 = 10 January 1236. The vocalizer/masorator’s colophon on the same page names the date as Shevat 998, i.e. ca. January 1238. A full description of the manuscript’s content and illumination, with photographs, can be found in Luisa Mortara Ottolenghi, *Hebraica Ambrosiana. II: Description of Decorated and Illuminated Hebrew Manuscripts in the Ambrosiana Library* (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1972), 119–25 and pls. I-XXIII. See also David Stern, “The Hebrew Bible in Europe in the Middle Ages: A Preliminary Typology,” *JSIJ* 11 (2012): 235–322, esp. p. 276.

The codex is richly illuminated throughout, at the beginnings of all the biblical books, and at the ends of some.<sup>2</sup> Where miniatures contain human figures, their faces are concealed in various ways: they are averted, or covered by flowing hair, or depicted as animal heads—an innovative mode of depiction that occurs for the first time in this manuscript.

It is significant that this codex does not conclude with the final words of the second book of Chronicles whose theme is the Temple,<sup>3</sup> but with a double-page spread of miniatures in an unusual format that is similar to the prefatory miniatures in Latin Psalters of the same period, with the difference that here the biblical miniatures are placed at the end of the volume (fig. 1). The right page (fol. 135v) is illuminated with a full-page diagram of the spheres encircling stars, the sun and the moon, with the latter two having human faces. The spheres are flanked by the four creatures inspired by Ezekiel 1:5–8.<sup>4</sup> The opposite page (fol. 136r) is divided into two registers. In the upper, the three mythical primeval

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2. B. 30 inf. (Pentateuch), fol. 1v, Genesis: initial word panel framed by animals and flanked by Adam and Eve (inscribed “Adam” and “Havah”); fol. 56 r, Exodus: initial word panel with three figures (from left to right)—a shrouded corpse, a young man sleeping on his bed, a crouching king with his left hand to his cheek and his right arm outstretched; fol. 102 r, Leviticus: initial word panel containing Binding of Isaac; fol. 135 v, Numbers: initial word panel—a lion and a dragon face each other, and above, a standard or banner with a black crowned lion rampant on gold ground; fol. 182v, Deuteronomy: initial word panel with Moses on Mount Horeb.

B 31 inf. fol. 1r, Joshua: micrographic initial word panel—dragon; fol. 16 r, Judges: ornamental initial word; fol. 3 v, Samuel: micrographic initial word panel topped by animals in arcade; fol. 67 r, I Kings: initial word panel with eagle playing harp, bird-headed hybrid animal ringing bells; fol. 104 r, Jeremiah: initial word panel with two lions and flying eagle; fol. 136 r, Ezekiel: four creatures (ox-, dog- and lion-headed winged humans, and a lion cub); fol. 163v, Isaiah: ornamental initial word panel; fol. 188 r, Hosea: ornamental initial word panel.

B 32 inf. fol. 1 r, Ruth: ornamental initial word panel; fol. 2 v, Ruth, end: miniature in two registers, upper register: Ruth at Boaz’ bedside (both lion-headed), lower register: riding lion-headed king preceded by a prophet with an upturned horn near a stream of water; fol. 3 r, Psalms: initial word panel with lion-headed King David playing the psaltery; fol. 34 v, Job: initial word panel: dragon-fighting centaur; fol. 48 r, Proverbs: ornamental initial word panel with dragons fighting; fol. 59 r, Song of Songs: initial word panel surmounted by a dragon; fol. 61 r, Ecclesiastes: ornamental initial word panel; fols. 66r, Lamentations: initial word panel with dragons; fol. 68 r, Daniel: initial word panel with dragons; fol. 78 r, Esther: initial word panel with animal headed enthroned king holding white flowering vine. fol. 83 r, Ezra: initial word panel—intertwined dragons; fol. 97 v, end of Ezra and beginning of Chronicles: explicit panel of intertwined dragons; fol. 135v-136r, double page: on fol. 135v, Sun, moon and heavenly spheres with, in corners, eagle, rooster, winged ox and lion, on fol. 136 r, primeval beasts Leviathan, Behemoth and Ziz, and eschatological banquet.

3 “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He has charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Any one of you of all His people, the Lord his God be with him and let him go up” (2 Chron. 36:23).

4 A cockerel replaces the human figure in accordance with the Hebrew homonym *gever*=man/*gever*=cockerel).

animals—Leviathan (in the form of a giant fish curled around an island), Behemoth (a bull approaching some trees) and Ziz (a griffin with outspread wings)—assert their respective dominions over water, land, and air.<sup>5</sup> The lower register shows a banquet in a paradisiacal garden. The Righteous are represented by five animal-headed figures wearing crowns and luxurious clothing feasting at a table laid with golden vessels, while two musicians entertain them. The double-page spread presents a vision of the afterlife based on talmudic and midrashic accounts of the Eschaton that include the rejoicing of the heavenly bodies, the apocalyptic struggle of the primeval beasts Leviathan and Behemoth (Ziz is less commonly mentioned), and finally the consumption of the Leviathan's flesh at the banquet of the elect in paradise.

A/One dissonance between text and image demands further inquiry. Although the text of this bible ends with a verbal promise that the Jerusalem Temple would be rebuilt by returning exiles, this messianic theme is not depicted. Instead, the pictorial conclusion is one of heavenly rejoicing, primeval-apocalyptic beasts, and an eschatological banquet, that is, the textual and pictorial conclusions of the codex do not agree. In other thirteenth-century texts and pictures, the Eschaton is depicted by the rebuilding of the Temple in messianic times.<sup>6</sup> In

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5 All three apocalyptic creatures, depicted in isolation as if copied from a model book, may have been based on bestiary models. This is most evident in the case of Ziz, who takes the form of a conventional griffin. See for example the bestiary Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 6838B, Folio 4r and 26v (Bestiary, Northern France, thirteenth century). By contrast, the London, British Library, Hebrew Miscellany Additional 11639, France, 1277-1286, f. 517v shows the Ziz (there called by its synonym Bar Yokhani) as a gigantic, web-footed bird with its equally enormous egg. See the British Library catalogue entry, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=19212&CollID=27&NStart=11639>.

The Leviathan curled to bite its tail has a parallel in British Library, Royal MS 13 B. viii, Folio 23r, where it illustrates a leaping salmon in Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica* (England (Lincoln?), ca. 1196–1223). See the digitized edition, accessed April 23, 2015, [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal\\_MS\\_13\\_b\\_viii](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_13_b_viii), with images and bibliography.

6 For studies of messianic hopes and their depictions, see Joseph Gutmann, "Leviathan, Behemoth and Ziz: Jewish Messianic symbols in art," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 39 (1968): 219–30; Idem, "When the Kingdom Comes: Messianic Themes in Medieval Jewish Art," *Art Journal* 27 (1967-68):168–175; Thérèse and Mendel Metzger, *La Vie juive au moyen âge* (Fribourg: Office du Livre, 1982), 274–83; Malka Rosenthal, "David Redivivus; Studien zur jüdischen Erlösungsidee in Sicht und Bild des 13. Jahrhunderts," in *Wenn der Messias Kommt: das Jüdisch-Christliche Verhältnis im Spiegel Mittelalterlicher Kunst*, eds. Lieselotte Kötzsche and Peter von der Osten-Sacken (Berlin: Selbstverlag Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1984), 27–76; Michael M. Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah: Art, Narrative, and Religious Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University

contrast, the banquet in the Ambrosian Bible is not a self-evident choice and requires explication.

The question I wish to pose does not concern the textual source for the primeval beasts and the eschatological banquet, but rather why the Eschaton was encoded in the theme of the banquet during the period in which the Ambrosian Bible was produced. My proposition is that the Eschaton was cast as an aristocratic banquet because of that theme's potential both to signify that the afterlife resembled a courtly ideal, and, simultaneously, that it embodied venerable Jewish traditions.

### **Feasting on the Leviathan's Flesh? Visual Words and Telling Details**

The Ambrosian Bible's Banquet of the Righteous (fig. 1) is a familiar image, having been often reproduced in books on Hebrew illuminated manuscripts and Jewish art,<sup>7</sup> and yet, the image repays closer scrutiny of its composition and of telling details. Five diners are seated behind a table laid outdoors among trees and fluttering birds, entertained by two musicians playing a viol/Vielle and pipe or recorder/Schalmei standing on either side. The five diners are the epitome of aristocratic, even royal status. Despite their mask-like, deeply-colored, zoomorphic heads—of a deer, lioness, eagle, lion and bull/ox—their faces conform to the thirteenth-century aristocratic predilection for a clean-shaven appearance.<sup>8</sup> The brown or ruddy heads and necks contrast with their owners' pale, fine human hands, betraying their hybrid natures. These are not animals dressed as humans, but humans whose heads are concealed by animal heads. All are splendidly dressed. Four of the five diners wear layered garments, as do the two musicians. The first person on the left wears a tight, tailored garment

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Press, 2010), esp. ch. 6 "Eschatological Hopes."

7 Edward van Voolen, *Jewish Art and Culture* (Munich; London: Prestel, 2006), 46–7, reproduced as "God's Favorite Fish."

8 Although the face of the lion-headed figure that is second from right appears bearded, he is not when compared to clearly bearded figures in the manuscript, e.g. on fol. 2v of the same volume. He is hairy, but the facial hair seems to identify the species rather than to constitute a beard.

of the type praised in literary descriptions of both men and women of fashion. Its bright red color and decoration with embroidery at the neckline and on the sleeves accentuate the wearer's figure. The next four diners all wear layered garments,<sup>9</sup> and all five wear golden crowns. Even the two musicians—smaller figures whose size and knee-length clothes denote either adolescence or their lesser importance—seem to be finely dressed with layered outfits.<sup>10</sup> These sartorial details situate both the diners and musicians in a courtly environment, and place them firmly among the nobility.<sup>11</sup> Long, ample and multi-layered garments, and long cloaks held together by expensive brooches were expressions of high status. Entertainers were often rewarded with gifts of clothing, and well-dressed musicians and performers reflected positively on the court they entertained.<sup>12</sup>

The diners appear to follow “courtly decorum,” or *Zucht*, in their body language and conversation,<sup>13</sup> A rich *Tischzuchten* literature, a didactic literature of table manners, exists from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, although its precise function as well as its degree of

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9 The second and third figure from right wear long mantles trimmed or lined in fur. The second guest from left appears to be a lady whose hair is gathered under a frilly *Gebende* (a headdress consisting of linen bands tightly wound around chin and forehead, *de rigueur* for married women on formal occasions) beneath a crown, while a large golden flower-shaped brooch adorns her green underdress. The central figure wears a red mantle that is lined and trimmed with ermine over a tightly fitting underdress. The next diner's outer garment appears to be a green *surcote* (sleeveless or short-sleeved long overgarment) over a brown undergarment. Finally, the diner on the extreme right with a red deer's head wears a brown *surcote* with fluttering faux sleeves and decorative borders that is held together by a large golden brooch, over a tightly fitted green undergarment. All the undergarments are trimmed with decorative embroidered borders both at their hems and elsewhere; some are held together at the neck by large jewelled brooches. (On types of medieval clothes, see Elke Brüggem, *Kleidung und Mode in der Höfischen Epik des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1989), 72 ff.

10 The flautist at left wears a red *surcote* with faux sleeves or mantle over a green undergarment; the fiddler on the right wears a broad fringed or fur collar, and his white mantle, with an asymmetrical arm-slit, is trimmed with broad embroidered borders. His three-quarter length undergarment of pale color is embroidered detail, and ends in a row of long fringes. This detail is comparable to the dress of the fashionably dressed messenger in the *Tristan* manuscript Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cgm 51, fol. 10v, in the upper register at extreme right. See a digital facsimile, accessed April 23, 2015,

<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0008/bsb00088332/images/index.html?id=00088332&fip=193.174.98.30&no=&seite=24>

11 On the social value of dress, see Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 136: “Clothes were also a sign of lordship, especially the mantle, which constituted an important part of the royal insignia.” Dress in earlier Jewish sources is discussed in Ezra Shereshevsky, “Some Aspects of Everyday Life in Rashi's Times,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, 65.2 (1974): 98–114.

12 Anne Schulz, *Essen und Trinken im Mittelalter (1000–1300). Literarische, Kunsthistorische und Archäologische Quellen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 61.

13 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 182.

realism have been hotly debated in scholarship.<sup>14</sup> Four of the diners, arranged in pairs, converse with each other—conversation being a valued “courtly” behavior. Eating in pairs and sharing dish, cup and knife was a common table arrangement at aristocratic banquets. The fifth, slightly smaller guest alone on the left might be understood as a shorthand sign for “many people” or “additional people” (of which these five are a *pars pro toto*).

Various other gestures also reflect courtly etiquette. As the eagle-headed man lifts the gilt Napf or Daubenbecher<sup>15</sup> to his lips (or rather, beak) to drink, with his other hand he gathers his cloak to prevent it from getting in his fellow diners’ way, while simultaneously contriving to show off its expensive fur lining. Discreetly revealing the fur lining of a mantle was an almost stereotypical gesture of the nobility, found in literature as well as in art.<sup>16</sup> Although it was considered more polite to drink with two hands, the demands of gathering the cloak made it difficult, so that single-handed drinking must have been quite acceptable.<sup>17</sup> Some of the diners conform to contemporary manners in reaching for food with the hand that was farthest from their dining mate.<sup>18</sup> Also, the guests are shown preparing to eat, but not eating. For example, the diner on the left touches or holds a half-loaf of bread, and the lady next to him is cuts her food (apparently also a half-loaf) with a knife. Further to the right, the man in the brown surcote takes hold of a double beaker (*Doppelbecher*). Nobody touches the meat bowls. Their restraint is consistent with both ideal table manners and stereotypical

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14 See Schulz, *Essen und Trinken*, 112–32.

15 The *Daubenbecher* was a traditional wooden beaker made of wooden slats or shavings held together by two twine or metal rings. Silver versions have been found in excavations; (See Schulz, *Essen und Trinken*, index s.v. “*Daubengefäß*” and pp. 189 and 488.)

16 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 144. Note that the cloak worn by the central figure is not a “*Schnurmantel*,” i.e. is not held together by a fashionable cord, but belongs to a slightly older type documented in Brüggen, *Kleidung und Mode*, 85ff. Also, see her discussion of cloaks and their fur linings and trimmings and their significance as markers of nobility for both men and women (43ff.), which includes both textual and visual sources.

17 See Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival, Titurel and Tagelieder*, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cgm. 19, *Straßburg?*, between 1228 and 1236, fol. 50, where a guest lifts a cup to his lips with both hands. The wide-open mouth of the lady is incompatible with her *Gebende*, whose effect, when tightly wound, was to make speaking as well as eating difficult.

18 See the prescription in the *Welscher Gast*, Vv. 501-4: “man sol ezzen zaller frist / mit der hant, diu engegen ist./ Sitzet din gesell ze der rechten hant/ mit der andern iz zehant.” Schulz, *Essen und Trinken*, 118.

depictions, which usually show the meat or fish whole and uneaten. It is difficult to derive precise interpretive nuances from every single detail; still this scene was surely intended to convey a noble company at table and had an ideological purpose, because “through the kind of food it ate and through the courtly ceremony at table, courtly society expressed its claim to a special place above those who did not participate in the noble lifestyle.”<sup>19</sup>

Like the appearance and behaviour of the diners, the appearance of the table and its accoutrements also signify a noble lifestyle. The long rectangular table is laid with an immaculate white tablecloth on which gold and silver tableware, as well as foodstuffs, are conspicuously displayed.<sup>20</sup> Since individual place settings did not exist, cups, bowls and carving knives were shared. In the absence of plates, guests took food with their hands from shared dishes. Although the fifth guest is without crockery, the large quantity of tableware signifies “plenty,” a crucial requirement of the aristocratic feast.

The food on the table is treated perfunctorily: all we see are whole chickens/fowl in bowls, and half-loaves of bread on the tablecloth. The jugs and barrel indicate that wine was served. In epics and romances, the triad of meat, fine bread, and wine distinguished the noble banquet, in contrast to the hermits’ meager triad of water, vegetables and coarse bread.<sup>21</sup> The artist appears to have been painting what James Rushing called “visual ‘words’,” i.e. “well-established ways of depicting certain activities,” in this case well-established, almost

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19 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 191.

20 The types of tableware shown are enumerated in medieval inventories and literary accounts: the two golden Kopf or Doppelkopf (double cups); two open, lidless beakers (Napf or Daubenbecher), and four-footed bowls (vaz or toblier). On Jewish use of Double Cups, see Vivian B. Mann, “‘New’ Examples of Jewish Ceremonial Art from Medieval Ashkenaz,” *Artibus et Historiae*, XVII (1988): 13–24; Annette Weber, “Kos Yeschu’ot: Der Becher des (doppelten) Heils: Überlegungen zur liturgischen Bedeutung des Erfurter Doppelkopfbeckers,” in *Die jüdische Gemeinde von Erfurt und die SchUM-Gemeinden: kulturelles Erbe und Vernetzung*, eds. F. Bussert, S. Laubenstein, M. Stürzebecher (Jena: Bussert & Stadeler, 2012), 136–149.

21 Anita Guerreau-Jalabert, “Aliments symboliques et symbolique de la table dans les romans arthuriens (XIIe-XIIIe siècles),” *Annales, Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 47/3 (1992): 561–594.

stereotypical modes of illustrating secular banquets.<sup>22</sup>

Banquet scenes both written and painted played a significant structural and symbolic role in contemporaneous literature, where they occupy a disproportionately prominent place in vernacular epics and romances, and even more so in their illuminated copies. Banquets appear at nodal points in the literature of the court; for example, they “serve as a pretext or prologue to most Arthurian romances,” many of which “begin with a highly formulaic description of a grand feast....”<sup>23</sup> In these secular contexts, they encode ideas about an idealized social order with utopian overtones (Fig. 2). In one of the earliest illuminated vernacular poems, the Berlin copy (ca. 1200) of Heinrich of Veldeke’s *Eneit*, the viewer is treated to a plethora of meal scenes: Dido welcomes Aeneas with a banquet (fol. 9v), Dido and Aeneas celebrate their wedding with a banquet (fol. 13r), Aeneas and his men share a meal at the mouth of the Tiber (fol. 25v), and Aeneas after receiving Lavinia’s letter is too lovesick to eat (fol. 71v). The cycle, whose ending is now missing, is likely to have ended with an illustration of the wedding feast of Aeneas and Lavinia.<sup>24</sup> The Munich codex of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival*, datable to the same time as the Ambrosian Bible, and perhaps from a similar geographical area, is also notable for the prominence of its meal scenes. The illustrations in this codex were inserted as picture quires. In a gathering of four full-page illuminated leaves, no fewer than three contain banquet scenes! Commentators have pointed out that these miniatures are highly standardized, with minimal iconographic details

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22 James Rushing, *Images of Adventure: Ywain in the Visual Arts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 259.

23 Sarah Gordon, “Culinary Comedy in French Arthurian Romance,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 30 (2004): 15–31, 17.

24 Heinrich von Veldeke, *Eneit* (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. germ. fol. 282. Thuringia or Bavaria, ca. 1215-20?) *Katalog der Deutschsprachigen Illustrierten Handschriften des Mittelalters*, vol. 4/1 part 1/2, eds. Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Norbert H. Ott, Martin Roland, Marcus Schröter, Christine Stöllinger-Löser (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2008), 98-103 (Nr. 31.0.1.), [online](http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/?xdbtdn!%22hsk%200621%22&dmode=doc#4), accessed April 23, 2015, <http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/?xdbtdn!%22hsk%200621%22&dmode=doc#4>

A detailed description of secular banqueting scenes can be found in Schulz, *Essen und Trinken*, 167–246,

that make it difficult to match the images to precise textual passages.<sup>25</sup>

Norbert Ott observed that miniatures of banquets (and combats) in medieval vernacular romances are often stereotypical, not because the painters were ignorant of the narrative content, but because these scenes encoded the social order both as a reality and, above all, as an ideal representation of a society that was able to engage in conflict and then to find resolution and a rebalance: “Behind the ... manuscript illustrations stands a ‘thought pattern,’ whose aim is not to illustrate texts, but to grasp and transmit the universally applicable, socially relevant aspects of literature as points of identification for a specific social group.”<sup>26</sup> Some banquet scenes, far from advancing the narrative plot, were included regardless of the narrative or emotional content of the texts; for example, the Munich codex of Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan* similarly privileges banquet scenes, even when they confuse the plot rather than advancing it (fig. 2).<sup>27</sup> Clearly, the banquets carried powerful ideological meanings, encoding ideas of power, representation, perfection, and order. In other words, vernacular epic manuscripts included banquet scenes not because they best illustrated a significant narrative plot but because of their symbolic function in constructing and buttressing their audience’s social ideals and identifications.

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25. See Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival, Titurel and Tagelieder*, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 19, Straßburg, 1228–1236, fol. 49v (wedding feast); fol. 50r (banquet where Kundrie supplicates Parzival), fol. 50v (banquet at the grail castle), accessed 20 November 2014, <http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/0008/bsb00088332/images/index.html?fip=193.174.98.30&id=00088332&seite=1>, and bibliography on the Marburger Repertorium, accessed 20 November 2014, <http://www.handschriftencensus.de/1286>.

Anne Schulz, *Essen und Trinken*, pp. 527–548, concluded that depictions of meals on the whole followed generic formulae, and that if we wish to find out how people dined in the Middle Ages, we should seek this information by means of archaeology.

26 Norbert H. Ott, “Literatur in Bildern. Eine Vorbemerkung und sieben Stichworte,” in Conrad Lutz ed., *Literatur und Wandmalerei I. Erscheinungsformen von Höfischer Kultur und ihre Träger im Mittelalter* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002), 153–97.

27 Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cgm 51, South Germany, second quarter of the thirteenth century, fol. 7r and v (feast at the court of King Marke), 30r. In these miniatures, the protagonists tend to change their appearance from scene to scene in a confusing manner, or their visual appearance contradicts the text. Digital facsimile on [http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00088332/image\\_1](http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00088332/image_1), fol. 7); also bibliography on the Marburger Repertorium: <http://www.mr1314.de/1286> (accessed 25.6.2014).

Meals carried an equally symbolic function in Christian religious culture. “In art and literature, banquet scenes evoke the Last Supper or the bounty of heaven.”<sup>28</sup> Perhaps it is not surprising that a medieval society, forever threatened by scarcity and famine, saw the banquet as the epitome of Edenic bliss. Caroline Bynum framed the sacral significance of commensality squarely within an exclusively Christian framework:

Eating in late medieval Europe was not simply an activity that marked off fine calibrations of social status... Eating was also an occasion for union with one’s fellows and one’s God, a commensality given particular intensity by the prototypical meal, the Eucharist, which seemed to hover in the background of any banquet.<sup>29</sup>

Any possible Eucharistic references need to be understood in dialogue with the powerful image of the feast or banquet as a secular image of an ideal social order, which resulted in the heightened role of banquets as tropes in sermon literature, especially in the vernacular. For example, Berthold of Regensburg’s vernacular sermon about the heavenly banquet, “Von Aht Leie Spise in dem Himelriche,” explicitly states that heavenly banquets surpass all earthly banquets.<sup>30</sup> A “spiritual speech” known as “Das himmlische Gastmahl” (the heavenly banquet), composed in a Franconian dialect during the second half of the thirteenth century reads “A table is spread in the heavenly realm....”<sup>31</sup> Banquets also play a pivotal role in Latin works, such as a polemical text of the twelfth century, Hermann the Former Jew’s Short

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28 Sarah Gordon, “Culinary Comedy in French Arthurian Romance,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 30 (2004): 15–31.

29 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 3.

30 Berthold von Regensburg, *Vollständige Ausgabe seiner Predigten mit Anmerkungen und Wörterbuch* vol. 1, ed. Franz Pfeiffer (Wien: W. Braumüller, 1862–1880), 220–32; Christoph Cormeau, “Essen und Trinken in den deutschen Predigten Bertholds von Regensburg,” in *Essen und Trinken in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, eds. Irmgard Bitsch, Trude Ehlert, and Xenja von Ertzdorff (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1987), 77–83.

31 Hans Neumann: “Die Lilie,” in *Die Deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters, Verfasserlexikon*, vol. 5 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985), cols. 828–831; Matthias Kirchoff and Janina Schäfer, “Inhaltlich unbestimmbare Bruchstücke? Neues zu den “Märenfragmenten” FB 150a, b und c,” in *IASL online*, accessed 20 November 2014, <http://www.iaslonline.de/>. For the text, see *Die Lilie, eine Mittelfränkische Dichtung in Reimprosa*, ed. Paul Wüst (Berlin: Weidmann, 1909), 68–72.

Work on the Subject of his Conversion. Herman, then still Judah, is inspired to begin his spiritual quest by a chivalric dream which culminates in a banquet: the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV invests him with knighthood by giving him a white horse, a gold embroidered belt, and a silk money purse, after which the dreamer “accompanied the king all the way to his palace. There, while he [the king] feasted with his friends, I sat down to the table beside him, as if his dearest friend, and from the same platter as he I ate a dish composed of all sorts of herbs and roots.”<sup>32</sup> Initially, a Jewish relative interpreted Herman’s dream in terms of worldly success, whereas after his conversion, Herman reinterpreted the dream of the banquet as an allegory of priesthood serving at the altar. Elsewhere in the Short Work, sharing banquet food signals acts of kindness on the part of Christians towards Herman/Judah; so it is clear that the banquet, even a secular one, carried clear overtones of Christian *caritas*.

The trope of the banquet bridged the secular/sacred divide when depictions of biblical or sacred subjects become courtly, a process known as “Höfisierung.” In a mural of the Last Supper at Babenhausen Castle (ca. 1250–1300), Jesus and the apostles are attended by two kneeling servants. One of them appears to be a seneschal or steward (*Truchsess*) holding his mace of office, the other one is clearly a cellarer or cup-bearer (*Mundschenk*) who pours wine from a large jug in this courtly interpretation of the New Testament scene. Jesus officiates as the “Lord of the Table.”<sup>33</sup> In this work, secular depictions influence the Last Supper, not the other way round. Another example of sacred iconography reframed in a courtly manner is a series of scenes from the life of David in a commentary on Psalms, which is notable for reinterpreting its protagonist as the hero of a chivalric epic.<sup>34</sup> David’s wedding feast, with all

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32 Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Conversion of Herman the Jew: Autobiography, History, and Fiction in the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 203.

33 Margit Krenn, “Christus als Fürst der Tafel. Ein neu entdecktes Wandmalereifragment im Schloss von Babenhausen,” in *Habitus: Norm und Transgression in Text und Bild; Festgabe für Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch*, eds. Tobias Frese and Annette Hoffmann (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2011), 297–314, pl. IX (p. 239).

34 Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek Msc Bibl 59, Bamberg, Michaelsberg monastery (?), ca. 1180, fol. 2v. See Gude

its details anchored in contemporary banqueting etiquette, is a case in point: the diners are placed behind a long table and served by servants as well as attended by musicians—and feast on chicken (fig. 3). The presence of meat and the presence of musicians are stereotypical ingredients of a courtly festive banquet.<sup>35</sup> Just as a courtly conception of David’s wedding feast had to feature musicians, so too in narratives of the Prodigal Son, the father’s joy at the return of the lost son was visualized by a courtly banquet, with servants and musicians.<sup>36</sup> Such a close association between noble feasting and music also informs the inclusion of musicians in the Ambrosian Bible’s miniature, because contrary to Bynum’s exclusively Christian framing, both the Christian Eucharistic and the Jewish eschatological imaginary could draw on the metaphor of the banquet as “an occasion for union with one’s fellows and one’s God”.<sup>37</sup>

In a pioneering study of the “social iconography” of the Last Supper sculpted on the choir screen of Naumburg Cathedral (ca. 1240-50), Jacqueline Jung demonstrated that every detail of dress, posture, and gesture conformed perfectly to the norms of behavior listed in contemporary vernacular *Tischzuchten*, manuals of table manners.<sup>38</sup> By recourse to these manuals, presumably written for a middle rank of *ministeriales* and possibly for burghers aspiring to noble rank, Jung was able to disprove a previous art-historical interpretation that Jesus and the apostles on the Naumburg screen exhibited peasant manners. Instead, the

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Suckale-Redlefsen, *Die Handschriften des 12. Jahrhunderts, Katalog der illuminierten Handschriften der Staatsbibliothek Bamberg*, Bd. 2 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 62. Walter Cahn, “Illuminated Psalter Commentaries”, in *Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical, and Artistic Traditions*, eds. Harold W. Attridge and Margot E. Fassler (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 241–264, 258.

35 Bumke reminds us that “The arrangement of the courtly meal always included music.” (Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 189.)

36 For example, see the window at Sens Cathedral, bay 17, panel 9 (a viol player); Bourges, ambulatory bay 5, panel 18; Lincoln Cathedral, sXXX.2.

37 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 3.

38 Jacqueline E. Jung, “Peasant Meal or Lord’s Feast? The Social Iconography of the Naumburg Last Supper,” *Gesta*, 42, 1 (2003): 39–61. The Last Supper relief is available online on the Bildarchiv Marburg, accessed November 20, 2014,

<http://www.bildindex.de/?+pgesamt:%27Naumburg%27%20+pgesamt:%27Abendmahl%27#home>.

congruence between the Naumburg Last Supper, its intended audience, and the *Tischzuchten* texts, enabled her to offer a historically-grounded interpretation of the Last Supper scene as a visual manifestation of both theological truths and the social ideals of the nobility. The Naumburg Last Supper is not a “peasant meal” but a “Lord’s feast.” This gathering of the Lord and his “court” embodied “an entire social ideal, in which outward splendor, physical beauty, noble descent, wealth and renown were joined with noble sentiment, refined manners, knightly virtues, and piety.”<sup>39</sup>

Just as refined courtly table manners were present in some thirteenth-century compositions of the Last Supper and other sacred subjects, so patterns from religious imagery were adapted in secular literature (and its illustrations) in order to construct a spiritual but non-ecclesiastical discourse, for example, the Eucharistic imagery in Wolfram’s *Parzival* (ca. 1205). In a socio-literary analysis, Albrecht Classen showed how meals and banquets mark the transformation of *Parzival* from an uncivilized boor, to a secular knight and finally to a figure representing religious salvation. The protagonist learns “how to understand the social, spiritual and cultural meaning of food.”<sup>40</sup> Such cross-overs rendered secular high society consonant with the apostolic entourage of Jesus, and vice versa.

It is important to distinguish the basic iconography of the Last Supper from that of the aristocratic banquet—despite cross-overs—to appreciate that the Ambrosian Bible’s eschatological banquet follows the typology of secular meals. Most Last Suppers, if they show any food at all (and many managed without food altogether), include depictions of the symbolic fish—which was eaten by the nobility on fast days and had no ascetic or plebeian connotations. Only in very exceptional cases—from the high Middle Ages onwards—did

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39 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, vol. 1, 59. .

40 Albrecht Classen, “The Symbolic Function of Food as Iconic Representation of Culture and Spirituality in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* (ca 1205),” *Orbis Litterarum* 62:4 (2007): 315-335, 330.

Last Suppers feature meat.<sup>41</sup> The typology of Last Suppers (either no food, only bread, or at most the Christological fish) is distinct from the food seen in banquets in secular art and literature (usually meat/chicken).<sup>42</sup> The Ambrosian Bible's eschatological banquet is cast from an essentially courtly mold: hence the aristocratic food triad, the dress code, the musicians—all stereotypical ingredients of aristocratic banquets.

The chicken/fowl in the Ambrosian Bible is both the most indicative and the most surprising item on the menu. The artist of the Ambrosian Bible could have chosen fish as an image of the Leviathan served at the eschatological banquet, though fish would have invited Christological associations with the Last Supper. Was the chicken on the table simply an iconographic mistake? Does it suggest a Christian, i.e. ignorant, artist? Should one doubt that the “*Se'udat Leviathan*,” i.e. the Leviathan banquet promised in so many rabbinic sources, was intended? Should we be looking for sources that explain the fowl on the heavenly menu? Although it is possible that a non-Jewish artist painted a stereotypical noble banquet and in the process committed a culinary faux pas, that is not the point of my inquiry. Rather, the “mistake,” if that is what it is, triggers the issue of the impact of this image on its audience. If the stereotypical depiction of a noble banquet was more important than iconographic exactitude, one must ask how this courtly imagery functioned among the prosperous Jews in Ashkenaz who were the patrons of Hebrew manuscripts in the first half of the thirteenth century. The banquet images suggest that Jewish patrons may have seen themselves as nobility in two ways: Jews as superior to the violent Christian nobility by virtue of their superior religion and ethical norms; and more specifically, Jewish (lay) leaders as the nobility

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41 One exception is the vernacular “Prayerbook of St. Hildegard,” ca. 1190, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 935, fol. 50v, where an unidentified animal's head is visible in the communal bowl. See <http://www.bildindex.de/obj00074128.html#home> (accessed 2 May 2015).

42 The serving of fish is exceptional. It is served at the Grail castle banquet, where it alludes to the Last Supper. (See Classen, “The Symbolic Function of Food,” 330.)

in their own community.<sup>43</sup> Social emulation, mixed with some ambivalence towards the culture to be emulated, may have played a role. We know that Jews in medieval Ashkenaz read in the vernacular and translated chivalric literature, sometimes critically, first into Hebrew and later, into Yiddish.<sup>44</sup> The aesthetic language of chivalry and the court was the primary language of status available in the German-Ashkenazi world.

### **The reception of Se'udat Leviathan in high medieval Ashkenaz: a familiar myth**

The subject matter of the double page fols. 135v-136r remained a mystery until it was decoded by Zofia Ameisenowa in her essay “The Messianic Banquet of the Just in a Hebrew Bible of the Thirteenth Century,” written in 1935.<sup>45</sup> She interpreted the Ambrosian Bible’s concluding images as “growing out of messianic expectations on the part of oppressed denizens of the ghetto.”<sup>46</sup> She discerned that the apocalyptic death of Leviathan, whose flesh will be served up at the banquet of the Righteous, had sources in talmudic legends, and that the banquet theme itself was developed in descriptive detail in the early medieval midrashic text *Otyiot de Rabbi Akiva* (also known as the *Alpha Beta de Rabbi Akiva* [The Alphabet of Rabbi Akiva]).<sup>47</sup> This text (see Appendix) does indeed present one of the most elaborate descriptions of a heavenly banquet. The righteous are shown with “royal clothing and royal

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43 On the Jewish elite’s self-understanding as (quasi-)nobility, see Marcus, Ivan G., “Why is this Knight Different? A Jewish Self-representation in Medieval Europe,” in *Tov Elem – Memory, Community and Gender in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish Societies. Essays in Honor of Robert Bonfil*, eds. Elisheva Baumgarten, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, Roni Weinstein (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2011), 139–152, and Sara Offenberg, “A Jewish Knight in Shining Armor: Messianic Narrative and Imagination in Ashkenazic Illuminated Manuscripts,” *The University of Toronto Journal of Jewish Thought*, 4 (2014): 1–14.

44 Martin Przybilski, “Ein anti-arthurischer Artusroman. Invektiven gegen die Höfische Literatur zwischen den Zeilen des Melech Artus,” *Zeitschrift für Deutsches Altertum und Deutsche Literatur*, 131:4 (2002): 409–435.

45 Zofia Ameisenowa, “Das messianische Gastmahl der Gerechten in einer Hebräischen Bibel aus dem XIII. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Eschatologischen Ikonographie der Juden,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 79 (1935): 404–422.

46 Ameisenowa, “Das messianische Gastmahl,” 415.

47 Ameisenowa’s view was seconded by Joseph Gutmann, “When the Kingdom Comes: Messianic Themes in Medieval Jewish Art,” *Art Journal* 27 (1967–1968): 168–175; Malka Rosenthal, “David Redivivus,” 27–76.

crowns and with royal precious stones/pearls” — “each of them sits like a king on a golden chair, and in front of each one stands a jeweled table.” The tableware described in the text is luxurious: “in the hand of each one a golden cup set with precious stones and pearls.” The textual menu contains only the finest: “the sap/nectar of life. And all the good things of the garden of Eden are spread before them on the table.” The domestic staff in the midrash is noteworthy: “Before each and every one, three ministering angels stand to serve them.” Finally, the written account of the entertainment outranks that available at the most refined and cultured courts: “a thousand ministering angels stand before them, holding in their hands viols and harps and cymbals and all manner of musical instruments and they entertain them during the meal, and the Holy One, blessed be He, stands by Himself and dances by Himself at the meal, and the dawn/sun and moon and stars and zodiac signs on His right and his left dance with Him before them.” Obviously, these elements are not all illustrated in the Ambrosian Bible miniature; there are evident divergences: in the miniature, the righteous sit at a shared table, not at individual ones; no chairs are visible; the angelic (or any) servants are absent; and they are entertained not by a dancing and singing God, but by two earthly musicians. The sun, moon and stars can be seen on the opposite page. Rather than matching a textual source point by point, the Ambrosian Bible image does both less and more, combining the apocalyptic banquet with the ancient promise—not included in the *Otyiot de Rabbi Akiva*—that the Just would feast on the Leviathan’s flesh in the afterlife. The *Otyiot de Rabbi Akiva* can, therefore, be regarded as only one of the possible sources for the Ambrosian Bible’s eschatological double page. Other legends must have played a part in determining the iconography of these two pages.

The eschatological banquet myth circulated widely and was rewritten among twelfth- and thirteenth-century Jews as *Se’udat Leviathan*, the Banquet of Leviathan. This reception of older myths helps us to understand better the resonance which banquet imagery in the

Ambrosian Bible had in its cultural milieu. By the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, we encounter a plethora of scattered citations concerning the myth of the eschatological banquet in a variety of contexts (liturgical, halakhic/custom literature, funerary epigraphy) but these evocations are usually of a cryptic nature; none of them fully details the actual myth.

Knowledge of the myth is simply assumed. For example, within the liturgy, the Banquet of Leviathan was evoked in a variety of contexts (see Appendix). Meir ben Isaac, who was prayer leader in Worms before the First Crusade, incorporated references to the Banquet of Leviathan both in his Shavuot hymn *Akdamut Millin* and in a *piyyut* for Shabbat Hatan, the Shabbat before a wedding.<sup>48</sup> *Akdamut Millin*, written in the eleventh century, became a mainstay of Ashkenazi liturgy during the thirteenth century. It evokes both the “contest of Leviathan and the Ox of the tall mountain” and the eschatological “feast and a meal [which God] will prepare for the righteous. They will be seated at tables of rubies and precious stones; rivers of balsam will flow before them. And they will delight and refresh themselves with refreshing cups [of wine]...”<sup>49</sup>. The later hymns written during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were more likely to make oblique or cryptic mentions of these themes by means of allusive language, from which follows that the writer “could assume that his public not only knew ... the various texts about the banquet of the Righteous, but also their use in older *Yotzerot* written for the same occasion”.<sup>50</sup>

In the halakhic and customary literature, invocations of the Banquet of Leviathan are equally cryptic. Moreover, they appear in a variety of contexts, as a kind of mobile signifier of bliss or reward in the world to come. In *Sefer Hasidim* (attributed to Judah the Pious, d.

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48 Elisabeth Hollender, “Das Mahl der Gerechten in *Yotzerot* für Shabbat Hatan” in *Die SchUM-Gemeinden. Speyer-Worms-Mainz. Auf dem Weg zum Welterbe*, ed. U. Reuter (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2013), 221–33.

49 Jeffrey Hoffman, “*Akdamut*: History, Folklore, and Meaning,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Volume 99, Number 2 (Spring 2009): 161–183, 181–2.

50 Hollender, “Das Mahl,” 232.

1216), the abbreviated reference to “being allowed to eat from Leviathan and Behemoth” occurs several times as a synonym of “having a share in the Garden of Eden,” or rather in the form of a threat: whoever transgresses this or that, will not be allowed to eat from Leviathan and Behemoth, i.e. will not have a place in paradise.<sup>51</sup> The denial of participation at the eschatological banquet is also used as a threat in the halakhic-customary literature. Thus, Moses ben Isaac of Vienna (ca. 1200–1270) threatened that “everyone who hunts animals with gentiles by means of dogs in the present will not see the feast of Behemoth and Leviathan”.<sup>52</sup> Moses ben Isaac was also one of the scholars reporting the dispute about the kashrut of the brill, in which Rabbi Ephraim of Regensburg (ca. 1100–1175) had been embroiled. Rabbi Ephraim ruled that “whoever eats brill will not merit to eat of the Leviathan.” (see Appendix). The promise of the eschatological Banquet of Leviathan (and the corresponding threat) occur in a wide variety of contexts, and more crucially, it is never explained in these sources. Clearly, the legends relating to this myth were considered to be well-known, so much so that they did not need to be retold. A brief allusion to the eschatological “Banquet of Leviathan” can even be found on a thirteenth-century tombstone of a synagogue official (Parnas) in Worms:

May he merit to receive the reward of the Righteous and their meal together with those who see the face of the King in the courtyard of the garden of their palace,<sup>53</sup> to enjoy the contest<sup>54</sup> of Behemoth and Leviathan...<sup>55</sup>

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51 For example Sefer Hasidim JTS Boesky 45 paragraph 236 / Parma 3280 H paragraph 531 and 806/1954.

52 Or Zarua Pt 1, Alpha Beta 47, lemma Zadi Quf: Moses ben Isaac, Sefer Or Zarua (Zhitomir: Shapira, 1862) vol. 1, p. 11.

53 Based on Esther 1:5: “... the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the castle/capital city, both great and small, seven days, in the courtyard of the garden of the king's palace (house).”

54 Thus Hollender, “Das Mahl der Gerechten,” 232 and n. 40.

55 Grave of Yekutiel ben Jacob Halevi, 1261. See the Steinheim Institute’s database Epidat of Worms cemetery epigraphs (Digitale Edition - Jüdischer Friedhof Worms, wrm-862, last modified - 2015-03-25 15:14 <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epidat?id=wrm-862>, for the complete Hebrew inscription with German

Such an allusion is only understandable if the trope of the eschatological banquet was widely understood in its time, and it reminds us that visual culture is as much an index of beliefs in the afterlife as “conventional” written texts. Thus, the eschatological legend of the banquet at which Leviathan will be eaten appears in a variety of contexts.<sup>56</sup> Instead of having a single consistent context in which these tales are found, we have varied and cryptic references, sometimes mere allusions, scattered in a wide range of contexts and literary genres. It is an unstable signifier that testifies to the ubiquity and familiarity of these myths.

The wide distribution of citations and allusions to the Banquet of Leviathan leads us away from a search for singular textual sources for the Ambrosiana image. Rather than seek to match text and image, we should ask why an early medieval midrash such as the *Otyiot de Rabbi Akiva* should have become influential for the thirteenth-century Ambrosiana illuminations. The *Otyiot*, together with other myths more explicitly identifying Leviathan and Behemoth on the banquet menu—which the *Otyiot* midrash does not—were in the minds of the Ambrosiana's creators. But why should this old midrash have been visualized at this time? The visual imagery of the two Ambrosian pages is a bricolage of legends circulating in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—in the liturgy, orally, and in allusions within the halakhic literature. That web of stories, refracted through liturgy, homilies and halakhic reasoning inform the Ambrosian miniature of the eschatological banquet because they resonate with a contemporary cultural environment in which banquets functioned as potent signifiers of peace, status, transcendent order, and extraordinary bliss. The great connotative power of the banqueting theme in the High Middle Ages suggested the choice and

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translation and photographs. See Hollender, “Das Mahl der Gerechten,” p. 232 and n. 40; Michael Brocke, “Der jüdische Friedhof Worms im Mittelalter – 1059-1519”, in *Die SchUM-Gemeinden. Speyer-Worms-Mainz. Auf dem Weg zum Welterbe*, ed. U. Reuter (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2013): 111–54, 126 and fig. 7.

56 This was already suggested by Andreas Lehnardt “Leviathan und Behemoth. Mythische Urwesen in der mittelalterlichen jüdischen Tradition,” in *Tiere und Fabelwesen im Mittelalter*, ed. Sabine Obermaier (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009):105–129, p. 126, who focussed on *Yalkut Shimoni* and the *piyyut* tradition.

combination of sources in the Ambrosian miniature, not the other way round. The midrash on the eschatological banquet could have evoked in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Jewish readers and viewers depictions of courtly banquets as found in texts and pictures of their own time. In other words, earlier traditions accessible to us in early medieval midrash were mediated through contemporary rewritings in liturgy and practical halakhah, and read in new ways in a culturally specific context.

### **Conclusion: shared mentalité and intercultural critique**

The iconographical eccentricity or “mistake” that we find in the Ambrosian Bible’s final pages—chicken or roast fowl instead of Leviathan—has opened a window onto the wider ideological connotations of courtly banquets, and thus helps locate the Ambrosian Bible in a web of textual and iconographic traditions that interact with historically contingent, socially and culturally determined networks. These webs and nets are indicative of the social nexus in which these material objects were made and used, and in which they could in turn produce the subjectivities of historically situated patrons and readers. It is this set of interactions that made it possible for the banquet theme to “cross over.”<sup>57</sup>

A close scrutiny of the banquet scene in the Ambrosian Bible reveals values similar to those that are evoked in many secular and sacred banquet scenes found in Latin and vernacular texts made in twelfth and thirteenth-century South Germany. Both the setting and the guests conform to “the protocol of the courtly banquet” identified by Bumke.<sup>58</sup> The banquet was a social ritual in whose ideal form utopian ideas of the perfect courtly social

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57 See Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, “A Plate Crosses Over,” in *Jewish Expression in the Visual Arts*, ed. Emily Bilski (Jerusalem: Adi Foundation, 2007), 38–42, accessed 21 November 2014, <http://www.adifoundation.co.il/My%20Documents/symposium%20texts/JelinekEng.pdf>.

58 Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, vol. 1, 182.

order were enacted in the face of actual violence, disorder, social instability, and fragmentation; the courtly banquet embodied “an entire social ideal.”<sup>59</sup> Beyond its identity as social ritual, however, the banquet also mediated spirituality between religious and secular contexts. Noble banquets, especially royal banquets, had a highly symbolic role in secular vernacular literature, in sermon literature (the heavenly banquet as superior to all earthly banquets), and in visual culture both religious and secular.

In the Ambrosian Bible, the eschatological banquet was chosen precisely because it lent itself to a staging of eschatological hopes in a widely available “semi-neutral” visual language or formula. The noble banquet was a social ritual understood as embodying social privilege and an idealized social order. But how could the trope of the aristocratic banquet appeal as an image of the afterlife to a Jewish patron who, despite probably having considerable wealth (to afford this manuscript), was not and could never aspire to be a member of the aristocracy? Did Joseph ben Moshe of Ulm’s choice represent an unrealizable social ambition, or does the otherworldly setting of the Ambrosian banquet constitute more than emulation? Does it perhaps voice an implicit ambivalence towards, or even critique of courtly norms and ideals? Despite their courtly arrangements, the banqueters are meant to feast on nourishment provided not by an earthly king or noble—who by means of his munificence at court feasts symbolically asserts his power—but by the “King who reigns over kings” (or “King of kings of kings,” in Pirkei Avot III, 1 and the “Aleinu” prayer) whose power transcends that of all earthly kings and nobles, including the rulers on whose protection Jews depended. This utopian critique of earthly hierarchies is visualized in the banquet miniature by all the diners wearing royal crowns. The Jewish emulation of courtly norms is further transcended by the eschatological framework of the double page (Leviathan, Behemoth and Ziz, and the cosmic rejoicing of the heavenly bodies). Thus the Jewish

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59 Ibid., 59.

eschatological banquet is an ambiguous image that implies both emulation and critique of social ideals in early thirteenth-century Europe. It also both alludes to the religious feast of the Eucharist and counters its symbolic force with ancient Jewish myths. The himmlisches Gastmahl is doubled, mirrored and supplanted by *Se'udat Leviathan*. Even though Jews were not literally part of aristocratic society during the thirteenth century, they could imagine themselves in “the world to come” as part of a social order superior to any courtly society.

There is not a single consistent context in which these tales are found, but varied and cryptic references, sometimes mere allusions, are scattered in a wide range of contexts and literary genres. Nowhere is the legend of the eschatological banquet fully elaborated with narrative and descriptive detail. Rather, knowledge of the legend's plot and detail seems to have been assumed. The contemporaneous Ambrosian miniatures do not correspond to any one text. Rather, the content is composite and just possibly based on oral traditions. It is an unstable signifier that testifies to the diffusion and ubiquity of these myths. In fact, the Ambrosian miniatures will themselves be sources for the dissemination of the myth of the eschatological banquet and *Se'udat Leviathan*.

## **Appendix: The Myth of the Eschatological Banquet in Ancient and Medieval Jewish**

## Sources

### a) Biblical, midrashic, and rabbinic sources

The biblical antecedents of the tradition of an eschatological banquet can be found in several prophetic books, of which the principal passage is Isaiah 25:6–9. But in the Bible, the banquet was not yet connected to the primordial monsters Leviathan and Behemoth, who are separately mentioned in Job 41:1–34, and in Psalms 50:11 and 80:13–14. A connection became explicit only later in talmudic aggadot and in midrashic literature.<sup>60</sup> The eschatological consumption of the primeval beast Leviathan is first mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud:

Rabbah said in the name of R. Johanan: The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come make a banquet for the righteous from the flesh of Leviathan; for it is said: “Companions [or fishermen] will prepare a banquet [*kerah*] of it [Leviathan]” (Job 40:30). “Kerah” must mean a banquet; for it is said: “And he prepared for them a great banquet and they ate and drank” (2 Kings 6:23). Companions must mean scholars; for it is said: “Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken for thy voice; cause me to hear it” (Cant. 8:13). The rest [of Leviathan] will be distributed and sold in the markets of Jerusalem... (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra, 74b–75a).

A midrash introduces both the apocalyptic final struggle of Leviathan and Behemoth, and the eschatological banquet, although separately:

R. Yudan b. R. Simeon said: Behemoth and the Leviathan are to engage in a wild-beast contest [קניינין] before the righteous in the Time to Come, and whoever has

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<sup>60</sup> According to Ginzberg, “Tannaitic literature does not contain anything concerning Leviathan and Behemoth, nor concerning the Messianic banquet... Only in post-tannaitic literature, especially in later Midrashim, does the Messianic banquet play a great part.” *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1909), vol. 5, 43 (n. 127). See also Andreas Lehnardt, “Leviathan und Behemoth,” pp. 114–126.

not been a spectator at the wild-beast contests of the heathen nations in this world will be accorded the boon of seeing one in the World to Come. ... in the Time to Come, the Holy One Blessed be He will make a banquet for his righteous servants, and whoever has not eaten a carcass (nevelah) in this world will have the privilege of enjoying it in the world to come.”<sup>61</sup> (Leviticus Rabbah 13:3)

In this midrash, the battle between the primeval creatures and the banquet of the righteous are treated under the same lemma, yet the text does not explicitly state what was eaten at the banquet.

The midrash Numbers Rabbah (13:2) describes the banquet as taking place in paradise, an idea that could underlie the garden location of the Ambrosian Bible banquet:

In the hereafter the Holy One, Blessed be He, will prepare a feast for the righteous in the Garden of Eden, and there will be no need either of balsam or of choice spices, for the north wind and the south wind will sweep through and sprinkle about all the perfumes of the Garden of Eden, and they will exhale their fragrance... Israel says to the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘When does the master of the house make a feast for his visitors and not sit down to table with them?... The Holy One, Blessed be He, says to them: ‘Behold, I will do as you ask.’ Thereupon the Holy One, Blessed be He, enters the Garden of Eden...<sup>62</sup>

One of the most elaborate descriptions of a heavenly banquet is found in an early medieval midrashic text known as the *Otyiot de Rabbi Akiva* or *Alpha Beta de Rabbi Akiva*. Based in part on earlier texts, the description expands the older material to include a banquet in a

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61 Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, (London: Soncino, 1983), vol. 4, 166–8.

62 Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, (London: Soncino, 1983) vol. 6, 500–502. The exposition of Numbers 13:2 interprets Song of Songs 4:16–5:1 initially as an allegory of sacrifice; then alternative interpretations are proposed, which progressively shade into martyrology and eschatology. “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved” becomes an allusion to Torah scholars and to those who sacrificed their lives to avoid mixing with gentiles.

courtly setting.

[The letter] Kaf – this is the palm [of the hand] for oaths, which one hits one on top of the other with great joy during the banquet of the righteous in the World to come and He stands and dances before them during the banquet and the Shekhinah walks with each righteous person, walks with him among the crowds of the ministering angels, and pillars of lightning surround them, and sparks of glory surround them, and sparks of light illuminate their faces, and rays of light illuminate their foreheads, and winds blow before them, and clouds blow against them, and mountains dance before them...

And Isaiah 26:11 said about this hour: “O Lord, they see not Your hand exalted.”

What does it mean “Your hand exalted”? [The words] teach us about the future. In the future Isaiah is going to say in front of the Holy One, Blessed be He, at the banquet of the righteous in the Garden of Eden at the hour when the Lord of the World dances before them: lift Your hand so that the wicked do not come to see the well-being of the righteous... ...At the same hour, the wicked come to the gate[s] of the Garden of Eden and stand and see the well-being of the righteous and they see all the righteous, each one of them according to his honor in royal clothing and royal crown and with royal precious stones/pearls, and each of them sits like a king on a golden chair, and in front of each one a jeweled table and in the hand of each one a golden cup set with precious stones and pearls, full of the sap/nectar of life. And all the good things of the Garden of Eden are spread before them on the table. Before each and every one, three ministering angels stand to serve them, and around their heads are rays of glory, and thunder and lightning then emerge from their mouths and the splendor of their faces shines from one end of the World to the other like the splendor of dawn, as it is said: “They that love Him as the sun when He goes forth in his might” (Judges 5:31). And the heavens and the heavens of heavens open their doors

and shower on them dewdrops of pure persimmon whose scent reaches from one end of the World to the other, and a thousand upon thousands of ministering angels stand before them holding in their hands viols and harps and cymbals and all manner of musical instruments and they entertain them during the meal, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, stands Himself and dances Himself at the meal, and the sun and moon and stars and zodiac signs on his right and his left dance with Him before them. And when the wicked ones see all this greatness and royalty and all this splendor and honor, they lift themselves because of the honor of the righteous by 100 ells—equal to the (height of the) Temple—in order to see them, and they ask: “Who are these to whom the Holy One, Blessed be He, does all this honor and greatness?” The ministering angels answer: “These are the people of the Holy One, Blessed be He, who occupied themselves with His Torah and His mitzvot [commandments] and He brought them to the Garden of Eden to give them their good reward and portion.” Straightaway the wicked ones fall on their faces and open their mouths in praise of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and of the righteous, and say: “Happy are the people who have it so; happy the people whose God is the Lord” (Ps. 144:15).<sup>63</sup>

Elements central to the talmudic and midrashic legends about the eschatological banquet are absent from the Otyiot. There is no mention of the Leviathan or the primeval beasts, let alone their apocalyptic contest. While the sun, moon and stars allude to “the sun and moon and stars and zodiac signs on His right and His left,” the Ambrosian Bible miniature seems to have replaced the zodiac signs with the four creatures of Ezekiel’s vision (which are not mentioned in the text).

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63 Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash. Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und Vermischter Abhandlungen aus der ältern jüdischen Literatur* (Lipsya [Leipzig]: Friedrikh Niyes, 1853–77), vol. 3, 33. Translation by the author, with thanks to Isaac Lifshitz for corrections.

## b) The reception of Talmudic and Midrashic legends in Medieval Ashkenaz

The Otyiot or Alpha Beta de Rabbi Akiva was known to the Ashkenazi sages; it was one of the sources from which they created piyyutim (liturgical poems).<sup>64</sup> In liturgical poetry, themes of the apocalyptic struggle between Leviathan and Behemoth and the eschatological banquet appear in a variety of contexts.<sup>65</sup> They appear in both the somber Ninth of Av liturgy and the festive Shavuot liturgy; the primeval beasts and/or the banquet of the Just enjoyed a special popularity on Shabbat Hatan, the Sabbath before a wedding when a bridegroom is called to the Torah. Already during the “heroic period” of Ashkenazi Jewry prior to the First Crusade, familiarity with motifs surrounding the eschatological banquet is attested to by the widely known hymn Akdamut Millin for the first day of Shavuot, composed by Meir ben Isaac, prayer leader in Worms (d. ca. 1095).<sup>66</sup> The double (inverted) acrostic hymn ends as follows:

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64 The Alpha Beta de Rabbi Akiva is widely cited in twelfth to thirteenth-century Ashkenaz, in: Sodei Razaya (Part 1, Letter *Het*); Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer ha-Rokeach*, *Hilkhot Yom Ha-Kippurim*, no. 217; *Mahzor Vitry*, no. 517; *Sefer ha-Terumah*, *Tefillin*, no. 213; Eliezer ben Joel ha-Levi, *Teshuvot*, no. 1149; Moses ben Isaac, *Or Zarua*, Alpha Beta nos. 1, 28, and 33; and in *Hagahot Maimoniyot Sefer Torah* 1:19.

65 See Lehnardt, “Leviathan und Behemoth”, 126: “Wie verbreitet ein solcher freierer Umgang mit biblischen Texten im mittelalterlichen Midrasch war, zeigt sich dann auch in der Liturgie...”

66 See Andreas Lehnardt “Leviathan und Behemoth,” 129. I cite the translation in the Service for the Feast of Weeks, in *The Festival Prayers, according to the Ritual of the German and Polish Jews vol. 2 (Service for the Feast of Weeks)*, trans. David A. de Sola, (London: Vallentine, 1906), 154–155. Akdamut Milin appears in the first volume of the Worms Mahzor (Würzburg, 1272), JNUL 4° 781/1, fol. 147v.

[Tet/Vav] The contest of Leviathan and the Ox of the tall mountain,

As they struggle one on one in battle,

[ Bet/Yod] Behemoth will gore with its horns in strength,

The fish will leap to meet it using its fins with might.

[ Mem/Alef] Its maker draws His sword upon it with power,

A feast and a meal will He prepare for the righteous.

[ Mem/Nun] They will be seated at tables of rubies and precious stones;

Rivers of balsam flow before them.

[Vav/Ĥet] And they delight and refresh themselves with refreshing cups,

Grape wine from creation preserved in wine vats.<sup>67</sup>

At this point, the poet/cantor turns to the congregation and invites the listeners to join the eschatological banquet:

[Zayin/Kaf] Righteous ones: Just as you have heard this lyrical praise,

You will assuredly be among that assembly.

[Vav/Alef] And you shall sit in supernal rows,

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<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Hoffman, "Akdmut: History, Folklore, and Meaning," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 99. 2 (Spring 2009): 161–183, 181–2.

If you hearken to His words<sup>68</sup> which issue in majesty.<sup>69</sup>

Meir seems to have based his own composition on an older piyyut tradition, exemplified by the venerated early Byzantine-era poet Eleazar Kallir's *Va-yikhon Olam*, for the Ninth of Av, which stages the apocalyptic struggle between Leviathan and Behemoth (but not Ziz) in great detail, and ends with a brief account of the banquet.<sup>70</sup> Meir b. Isaac reversed the balance and treated the demise of Leviathan and Behemoth briefly, while developing the banquet sequence in more detail. He may have responded to the detailed banquet description in *Otyiot de Rabbi Akiva*, and perhaps this change relates to the nascent chivalric culture in which his congregants and followers lived.

“*Akdmut Millin*”, while written in the late eleventh century, is first attested in Ashkenazi liturgical manuscripts of the mid-thirteenth century, suggesting that at the time the Ambrosian Bible was illuminated the myth of the primeval beasts and the eschatological banquet was widely known. “*Akdmut Millin*” was not alone in elaborating the classical Kallirian heritage; out of sixteen extant *Yotzerot* written by Ashkenazi poets for *Shabbat Hatan*, eight combine allusions to the primeval beasts with a description of the eschatological banquet.<sup>71</sup> These hymns construct a conceptual bridge from Creation (including of the primeval beasts), followed by the first wedding between humans, to the Eschaton of redemption, which is cast in the form of a banquet.

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68 This is a reference to the immediately following public reading of the Ten Commandments during the Torah reading of *Shavuot*.

69 Hoffman, “*Akdmut*,” 182–3.

70 Jefim Schirmann, “The Battle between Behemoth and Leviathan according to an Ancient Hebrew Piyyut,” in: *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, 4/13 (1970), 327–369; See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 219; T. Carmi, *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 227–32.

71 Elisabeth Hollender, “Das Mahl der Gerechten in *Yotzerot* für *Shabbat Hatan*”, in: *Die SchUM-Gemeinden. Speyer-Worms-Mainz. Auf dem Weg zum Welterbe*, ed. U. Reuter (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2013), 221–33. My thanks to Elisabeth Hollender for sharing her transcriptions of unpublished *Yotzerot* with me.

The mythical elaborations of the apocalyptic struggle of Leviathan and Behemoth were also invoked in exegesis, halakhah, the responsa and minhagim (customary) literature. Rashi (Solomon ben Isaac, 1040–1105) only briefly mentions the midrashic sources of the tales connecting the great monsters of creation with the Eschaton in his commentary on Genesis 1:21:

“The huge creatures”: The large fishes that are in the sea. And according to the statement of the Agada [Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 74b], it means here the Leviathan and its consort which He created male and female. He, however, killed the female and preserved it in salt for the benefit of the righteous in the time to come, for had they been [permitted to be] fruitful and to multiple, the world could not have endured because of them.<sup>72</sup>

A century or so later, Eleazar of Worms (ca. 1160–1238) hints at the Leviathan banquet in his Torah commentary:

“And God created”: Leviathan, upon whose fins the entire world rests... there is a hint here to truth (EMeT) [in the final letters of the words] “And God created, (Va YibrA ElohiM ET)” for all things which have been said regarding him are true. And who will eat him? People of truth who are involved with the Torah of truth.<sup>73</sup>

The elliptical formulation of both Rashi and Elazar of Worms in their exegesis of Genesis 1:21 assumes that the lore of the Leviathan and the eschatological banquet were known, perhaps orally.

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<sup>72</sup> *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary*, eds. M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silbermann, (London: Shapiro, Vallentine & Co., 1929), vol. 1, 5–6.

<sup>73</sup> Eleazar of Worms, *Perush ha-Rokeah al ha-Torah*, ed., Hayyim Konyevsky (Bnai Brak / New York, 1978-86), to Gen 1:21. I cite the translation in Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature*, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1997), 78, in a chapter titled “Harnessing the Dragon” which offers a number of helpful insights into the cultural history of the Leviathan in medieval Ashkenaz.

Halakhic and customary texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries continue to make reference to this lore. In all these texts, some of which are contemporaneous with the making of the Ambrosian Bible, knowledge of the Banquet of Leviathan is assumed rather than explicitly communicated, as all of these texts lack detail. For example, in *Sefer Hasidim* (attributed to Judah the Pious, d. 1216), an abbreviated reference to “being allowed to eat from Leviathan and Behemoth” occurs as a synonym of “having a share in the Garden of Eden.”<sup>74</sup> In a group of halakhic compendia, the Leviathan banquet appears as a reward for the abstention from gentile hunting.<sup>75</sup> Rabbi Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg’s (ca. 1220–93) responsum on the subject is brief and cryptic: “But I, the author, declare that whosoever hunts animals with dogs, as do the gentiles, will not be allowed to participate in the feast of the Leviathan.”<sup>76</sup> The connection between the two (hunting and the feast of Leviathan) can only be understood by recourse to Rabbi Meir’s source, the more detailed discussion by his teacher R. Moses ben Isaac of Vienna (ca. 1200–ca. 1270):

It is written: “Happy is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the wicked” (Ps 1:1). Rabbi Shimon ben Azai interpreted: “Happy is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the wicked” – [that is he] who did not walk in the theatres and circuses of the gentiles, in other words, [also in] palaces and... when they continue their entertainment and their levity. “Nor stood in the way of sinners”—[refers to those] who did not participate in their *kynegia*. Our rabbi Solomon [Rashi], of blessed memory, interpreted [Aboda Zara 18b]: “*kynegia*”—that is the hunt after animals by

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74 For example *Sefer Hasidim* (JTS, Boesky 45) pars. 236 and 806; Parma (Biblioteca Palatina, H 3280) pars. 531 and 1954.

75 On a related topic, see Leor Jacobi, “Jewish Hawking in Medieval France: Falconry, Rabbenu Tam, and the Tosafists,” *Oqimta* 1 (5773 [2013]): 421–504, accessed 26 May, 2014, <http://www.oqimta.org.il/oqimta/5773/jacobi1.pdf>

76 Meir b. Baruch of Rothenburg, *Sefer Sha'are Teshuvot*, ed. Mosheh Aryeh Bl'okh, / Rabbi Meir's von Rothenburgs bisher unedirte Responesen, ed. Moses Bloch (Berlin: Itzkowski, 1891), 7, responsum no. 27. (Cited in Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion*, 126 n. 11.)

means of dogs and all their doing is for entertainment and enjoyment, as for example in BT Chullin 60b: “Was Moses a hunter...?” And it says in Leviticus Rabbah in the Pericope Vayehi [actually, in Shemini, Lev. R. 13:3]: R. Pinhas said: “Behemoth and Leviathan are the kynegia of the Righteous in the future to come.” And on that basis I, the author, say that everyone who hunts animals with (in the company of) gentiles by means of dogs in the present will not see the feast of Behemoth and Leviathan, which are the pursuits [קניגיון, derived from kynegia] of the Righteous in the world to come.<sup>77</sup>

In the prooftext in Leviticus Rabbah 13:3 (see above), the key word קניגיון seems to designate Graeco-Roman animal fights and gladiatorial games, but Rashi (and then also Moses ben Isaac and the Maharam) recontextualized it to refer to hunting with hounds, which Rashi permitted. Moses ben Isaac and Meir of Rothenburg took the opposite view and banned hunting by Jews. They specified that this form of hunting is not for food (since the prey was not slaughtered according to the laws of kashrut), but “for entertainment and enjoyment,” a clear reference to the aristocratic status of hunting. Whereas Leviticus Rabbah maintains symmetry between the prohibition of animal contests in the here-and-now and the promise of mythical animal contests in the afterlife, Moses ben Isaac proposed that the reward for abstaining from one aristocratic pastime—hunting—would be another aristocratic pastime—the banquet (and not some form of hunting in heaven).

Moses ben Isaac makes an oblique reference to the Leviathan banquet again in another part of his oeuvre: in his Rules for Shabbat, he mentions the banquet in a discussion of the order of blessings in the additional Shabbat prayers:

The Shabbat Musaf [additional] prayer was established in an order of the alphabet of

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<sup>77</sup> Moses ben Isaac, Or Zarua, Pt 1, Alfa Beta 47, lemma Zadi Quf. Moses ben Isaac, Sefer Or Zarua (Zhitomir: Shapira, 1862) vol. 1, 11.

“Tashraq” [i.e. the inverted Hebrew alphabet from Tav to Aleph]...

He-dalet-gimel-beit-aleph [sounds like] "they will bring a Leviathan and the friends will feast on him."<sup>78</sup>

Again, the merest allusion to the feast of Leviathan, based on a rather far-fetched proof-text (an obscure verse in Job) could only be intelligible to those familiar with this lore and the midrashic sources of Moses ben Isaac's interpretation.

The eschatological banquet could also become the promised prize to be achieved by abstaining from foods whose kashrut was controversial. The controversy surrounding the kashrut of a fish called in textual sources variously *barbuta* and *labuta* presumably pivoted around the potential for confusion between the kosher brill (French *barbue*) and the closely related European turbot (Old French *tourbot*) of disputable status. Whereas Rabbeinu Tam (Jacob ben Meir, 1100–71) had permitted the consumption of brill, Moses ben Isaac and others discourage their readers from eating the kosher brill in order to avoid either confusion or the appearance of eating its nonkosher near-twin. The turning point from permission to prohibition occurred during the career of Rabbi Ephraim of Regensburg (d. ca. 1175), as reported to Moses ben Isaac by Judah the Pious:

Whoever eats the *labuta* fish will not merit to eat of the Leviathan. And when asked about the story, he said he had heard a truthful account from [his teacher] Ephraim of Regensburg: Once, he permitted [the eating of the *labuta* fish] and in the night, in his dream, they brought before him a bowl full of creepy-crawlies to eat, and he was angry with the one who brought it. And he (the bringer) said to him: why are you

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78 Moses ben Isaac, *Or Zarua* Part 2, *Hilkhot Shabbat*, no. 50. (Moses ben Isaac, *Sefer Or Zarua* (Zhitomir: Shapira, 1862), vol. 2, 21–22.) The proof-text is part of the inverse order of the alphabet. “The friends will feast on him” is a quote from Job 40:30 as interpreted in Talmud B. Batra 74b and 75a. Bring – *ביארו* relates to *בא*, the last letters of the Tashraq alphabet. My thanks to Isaac Lifshitz, who initiated me into the intricacies of the Tashraq alphabet and assisted me with the present translation.

angry? Are you not the lenient one? And he was angry at the dreamer who spoke to him thus. And meanwhile he woke up and remembered that he had permitted the labuta fish in the daytime. Straightaway he got up from his bed and broke all the pots and bowls from which they had eaten. And whoever refrains from eating them, blessings will rest on his head.<sup>79</sup>

The controversy is cited in a number of sources.<sup>80</sup> In all versions, Rabbi Ephraim initially follows Rabbeinu Tam's authority and permits the brill, but is then made to recant when he is served a plate of creepy crawlies in a dream, in some versions by Elijah the prophet.<sup>81</sup> The moral is always the same: whoever eats the (technically kosher) brill in this world will not merit to eat Leviathan in the next, i.e. will be excluded from the eschatological banquet/will not have a share in the world to come. The argument is not really halakhic, but the penalty in the afterlife is severe. The "symmetry" of the argument revolves around the consumption of fish (brill/Leviathan). Although this case may seem tangential, it illustrates the extraordinary aura surrounding the Leviathan's role at the eschatological banquet.

To gauge how widespread this apocalyptic-eschatological lore was, we also need to give more credit to oral and material culture, in which poetry was performed and disseminated outside of books. Hollender compellingly demonstrates "popular" dissemination, via the liturgy, of the eschatological lore of the primeval beasts and the eschatological banquet in the inscription on a tombstone in the Worms cemetery (See above, p. xx). These examples could be multiplied; it is clear that the lore around these themes was in circulation during the period

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79 Or Zarua, Part 4, Piskei Avodah Zarah, Par. 200. Moses ben Isaac, *Sefer Or Zarua* (Jerusalem: Hirschensohn, 1887-90), vol. 4, 54-55.

80 In addition to the Or Zarua, cited in the previous footnote, see *Sefer Tashbetz* sect. 252, and *Hagahot Asheri Avodah Zarah* 2, 41, 2. See Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Peering Through the Lattices: Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 164-5.

81 Kanarfogel, *Peering Through the Lattices*, 164f.

preceding and coinciding with the making of the Ambrosian Bible.

### **Figure Captions**

Fig. 1: Eschatological Banquet of the Leviathan (Milan, Bibl. Ambrosiana B 32 inf, fol. 136r).

Fig. 2: Feast at King Mark's Court in Gottfried von Straßburg: *Tristan und Isolde* (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 51, fol. 30r)

Courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München.

Fig. 3: King David's Wedding Banquet in Petrus Lombardus, Psalms Commentary (Bamberg Staatsbibliothek Msc Bibl 59, fol. 2v).

Courtesy of Staatsbibliothek Bamberg, Gerald Raab.