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THE SIREN'S SEED

Abstract

In two liturgical Pentateuchs from Northern Europe from around 1300, images of sirens appear unexpectedly and in ways that vary from common siren iconography. Perhaps these human–animal hybrids, or mixta, in their elusive sexuality and transgressive boundary-crossing articulate Jewish cultural concerns with gender politics. Feminist bestiary studies and feminist studies of vocality (the siren's song) provide new insights into medieval gender politics and its subversions.

The siren has long served as a figuration of monstrous and lethal femininity. Her song, as much as her beauty, has lured seafarers to perdition, unless they were as wily as Odysseus. And what about Jewish sirens in the rabbinic and medieval Jewish imaginary? Could they lure to perdition the metaphorical sailor on the sea of Talmud? Could the siren in Jewish contexts sing with the proscribed voice of … the Woman?

The siren not only reveals the standard signs of femininity such as nudity and hair, she also creates a counterpoint between two contrasting images of femininity – her own nude alluring image and the figure of the silent and covered-up "Woman of Valor." The site where this counterpoint emerges is the set of books written and illuminated for Jewish men's liturgical performance – in this case, two liturgical Pentateuchs.[1]

This essay adopts an expanded theoretical framework that takes account of recent gender studies research, especially on masculinities. This theoretical framework will include input from the fields of masculinity studies, feminist sound studies, feminist studies of the bestiary, and the history of monsters. One of the questions raised is how theories of gender can help us to better understand the cultural work done by art in medieval Jewish societies. The essay takes a cross-cultural perspective on medieval visual representations of masculinities and femininities, and aims to explore broadly how books, as material and aesthetic objects, came to function as markers of Jewish elite masculinity in medieval Tzarfat and Ashkenaz, even though Jewish masculinity was always unstable as it was in constant dialectical tension with Christian gender constructs. In a dynamic intersection with social aspirations, elite Jewish patrons' masculinity was constantly queered by the incommensurability of rabbinic ideals (predicated upon the primacy of learning) with Christian lay elite masculinities (in tension between the dictates of power, the ideals of cultural refinement, and the claims of religiosity). The question then arises of how beautiful books, and especially religious books illustrated with ostensibly secular iconographies, might have contributed to the constitution of elite Jewish masculinities; after all, there was no compelling need to insert bestiary and other secular imagery into the lavish ornamentation of a liturgical Pentateuch commissioned from a professional illumination workshop. Allegorical readings take us only so far.

Consider the imaginative deployment of bestiary imagery in two Pentateuch manuscripts: the liturgical Pentateuch Wrocław (ex-Lviv/Lwów) Ossolineum, Pawlikowski Collection, Hebr. 141, and the "Rothschild Pentateuch," Getty Museum, Ms. 116, to which the Pawlikowski codex appears to be closely related. The imagery serves as a form of social commentary closely yet ambiguously related to the self-understanding of the Jewish elites in the borderlands between France and the Holy Roman Empire around 1300. In both manuscripts, a wealth of illumination was taken from the treasure trove of conventional elements found in bestiaries and other "secular" iconographic sources; in addition, the Pawlikowski Pentateuch contains biblical imagery.

[1] A liturgical Pentateuch contains the five books of Moses structured according to the annual Shabbat (Sabbath) Torah readings, followed by the Haftarot (the prophetical and hagiographa lections) and often also by the Megillot (the scrolls read for certain festivals) and other biblical books read in liturgical contexts. See David Stern, *The Jewish Bible: A Material History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 120ff.

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Using as my case study the figure of the siren, a prominent inhabitant of the medieval bestiary, I hope to show how a comparative study of Jewish and Christian gender constructs in the field of visual representation can enrich our understanding of the cultural exchanges and diversity of medieval Europe.

The Siren in the Rothschild Pentateuch

Of the two manuscripts considered here, only one is firmly dated: the Rothschild Pentateuch has a dated colophon from 1296, and its original owner appears to bear a French-sounding name.[2] The Rothschild Pentateuch was signed in a scribal colophon (fol. 583v) by Elijah ben Meshullam, who calls himself the *lavlar* (rabbinical court scribe – from the Latin *libellarius*) for the *chaver* (friend, fellow, associate, rabbinic student) Joseph ben Joseph Martel or Marteil on Monday the 15th of Tammuz in the year 5056 since the creation of the world (June 17, 1296 CE). The codex contains a multi-text composed of parallel texts. The Masoretic Hebrew biblical text in the central column of each page is framed by three auxiliary texts: the Aramaic Targum Onkelos on the inside column,[3] written in a slightly smaller biblical square display script; Rashi's commentary in the outside column and sometimes above or below the biblical text, written in a distinct Gothic version of Hebrew script; and the Masorah.[4] The short Masoretic notes of the *Masorah parva* are written mostly in the intercolumnia, the longer Masoretic notes of the *Masorah magna* above and/or below the texts, extending over all three columns. The specialized scribe Elijah ben Jehiel, who copied out the Masorah and punctuated the other (biblical and Targumic) texts, signed his work separately in the Masorete's trademark minute script.

The layout of the pages is fairly flexible, expanding and reducing where necessary the space allotted to the *Masorah magna* and to Rashi's commentary, since the quantity of Masorah varies and since Rashi commented in greater or lesser detail on various verses and sometimes not at all. Sometimes the *Masorah magna* is shaped into *Masorah figurata* – that is, geometric or animal/dragon/hybrid shapes. Its shapes can enter into dialogue with the illuminated ornamentation. Together, *Masorah figurata* and miniatures articulate the liturgical structure of the book (beginnings and ends of Pentateuchal books, beginnings and ends of weekly Torah readings). The manuscript also contains a full-page picture of a menorah and a map of the wanderings of the Israelites through the desert: these images follow a tradition that is traceable to diagrams designed by Rashi.

As the scribal colophon (fol. 583v) informs us, the Pentateuch features Hebrew commentary (by Rashi) and the Aramaic Targum Onkelos (translation-paraphrase). No place is named by any of the scribes, but the patron's surname sounds French, and the style of the illuminations may point to Lotharingia/Lorraine, a borderland between French-speaking Tzarfat and German-speaking Ashkenaz.

The date of completion is specified as the 15th of Tammuz – a Monday just two days before the fast of the 17th of Tammuz, which inaugurates the three weeks of high-summer mourning for the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. The 15th of Tammuz could have been a joyous occasion accompanied by public readings from this very Pentateuch (as Monday is a day on which one reads from the Torah in synagogue).

What is the relationship between the consonantal text and its Masoretic paratext, and between micrographic *Masorah magna* and illumination as rival forms of manuscript ornamentation coexisting in the same codex? And what is the relationship between the scribe and the illuminator? Are they one and the same person, as Rosy Schilling has suggested?[5] My supposition is that this codex was illuminated in the Franco-German borderlands, possibly Lorraine. The

[2] Getty Museum, Ms. 116 (object number 2018.43), formerly in the Stadtbibliothek Frankfurt, gifted by Adele Rothschild, deaccessioned by the Stadtbibliothek in 1950 from the private collection and acquired by the Getty Museum in 2018. It is described by Rosy Schilling and illustrated in Georg Swarzenski and Rosy Schilling, *Die illuminierten Handschriften und Einzelminiaturen des Mittelalters und der Renaissance in Frankfurter Besitz* (Frankfurt am Main: Baer, 1929), 70.

[3] It does not use the traditional (and confusing) verse-by-verse alternation found in the majority of Franco-Ashkenazi Masoretic Bibles. On interverse Targum, see Stern, *Jewish Bible*, 106–107.

[4] Targum Onkelos is a Roman-era Aramaic translation/paraphrase of the biblical text. The Masoretes provided philological apparatuses to the Bible in fifth- to tenth-century Tiberias, Jerusalem, and Babylonia; Rashi (Rabbi Isaac ben Solomon, Worms and Troyes, 1040–1104) wrote influential biblical glosses that quickly became the mainstay of European Hebrew Bible commentary.

[5] Schilling in Swarzenski and Schilling, *Die illuminierten Handschriften*, 70: "Very probably the artist was Jewish; this is indicated by the varying size and arrangement of the Hebrew headings, which are of a piece with the ornamentation." All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Rothschild Pentateuch had a separate companion volume of Megillot.[6]

The decorated page fol. 393r closes the Torah portion Matot ("Tribes") and opens the Torah portion Masei ("Journeys"), covering Numbers 33:1–36:13, which maps the Israelites' migration through the desert, legislates cities of refuge, and eventually sees the resolution of the inheritance claim of the daughters of Zelophehad (Fig. 1).[7]

The page is articulated through a Gothic-turreted architectonic structure that frames the *explicit* and *incipit* words. Its corners extend into vegetal scrolls. Between and above this structure, a lion(?)-headed hybrid biped scowls and sticks out its tongue at a large bird of prey. An owl has caught a hapless mouse or rat in its beak. A hunting dog (with collar) bounds toward a siren creature: a pink, scaly fish-tailed and finned body becomes a dress from which a youthful human neck and head emerge, as well as an arm and a hand. The hand holds up a hand mirror with a polished silver surface – it is unclear whether the siren is looking in the mirror or holding it up to the dog. The siren may be female, but also may be male – its sex is obscured by the hiddenness of any breasts or any other visible markers of gender and by the sketchiness of the short hair. The rose-colored tunic or fish body could belong to either, but certainly we are not seeing the stereotypical siren whose upper body is clearly that of a (naked) woman.

This imagery is consistent with the Rothschild Pentateuch's menagerie of counter-natural and sometimes humorous *mixta* and scenes of *mundus inversus* ("upside-down world") crammed into and cavorting around well-ordered Gothic architectural forms.[8] And yet this siren, a creature half-human half-fish, is both familiar and strange. It is familiar as the mythical creature known from antiquity, but it is strange in that its precise iconography diverges from the well-established features of the medieval mermaid seen in numerous illuminated bestiaries. In those bestiaries, the siren rears her beautiful, fully human naked upper body, showing her breasts and a head with flowing long hair, upright in the waves, seducing unsuspecting mariners with her beautiful, soporific song – and inviting the book's user to sing or hear songs. In this Pentateuch, however, the Hebraic siren is fully dressed in a scaly pink fish-skin that becomes a tunic toward the neck, so that we see only a hand holding a mirror (one standard attribute of medieval sirens, reflecting their beauty), and the hair is so short that, as mentioned, it is not even certain whether the siren is a young woman or a young man. Or could the siren even be a siren-child? Rather than rearing out of the sea, the siren's body is in a horizontal posture – a posture almost indicative of being beached, so that instead of threatening some mariners, s/he is threatened by a hunting dog.

It would be futile to investigate direct text – image correspondences here. The biblical passage describes the Israelites' journeys through the desert. Rather, the siren is part of a series of bestiary themes that wove its way loosely through the book, allowing the owner/s to display their knowledge of *naturalia*. I suggest that including bestiary knowledge was an avenue for asserting social status and somehow taming "secular" knowledge and making it subservient to Bible study and liturgical performance.

The Pawlikowski Pentateuch: A Battle of Soldiers against Mariners and Mariners against Siren

The Rothschild Pentateuch's strange siren is not the only siren in the Hebrew manuscripts of its time, and neither is its bestiary-inspired series without comparison. A liturgical Pentateuch in the Library of the National Ossoliński Institute of Poland (Ossolineum), Ms. Pawl. 141 (formerly in Lviv/Lwów, now in Wrocław) is also illuminated with animals and *mixta* (hybrids), prominent among them being a siren. The codex lacks a date. It contains the Pentateuch with the parallel Aramaic Targum Onkelos in the outside column, and five Megillot and Haftarot, all punctuated and vocalized, with *Masorah magna* and *parva*. It is of a similar size to the Rothschild Pentateuch, though less bulky, for unlike the Rothschild Pentateuch it does not include Rashi's commentary.

[6] Ibid.: "The matching Megillot volume was on the art market with Hiersemann in Leipzig in 1905." Laura Feigen is researching the modern history of the codex.

[7] Getty Museum, Ms. 116 (object number 2018.43), fol. 393, https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/109P63 (accessed on 13 July 2023). The Torah portions Matot and Masei are merged into a double *parashah* in many years, but are sometimes read separately.

[8] On *mixta*, see Eva Frojmovic, "Neighbouring and Mixta in Thirteenth-Century Ashkenaz," in *Postcolonising the Medieval Image*, ed. Eva Frojmovic and Catherine E. Karkov (London: Routledge, 2017), 241–260.

Fig. 1. Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 116, fol. 393r.

Possibly, it was completed at much the same time as the Rothschild Pentateuch and perhaps in a similar geographical area.[9] The style is similar, though the Pawlikowski Pentateuch appears more conservative, more controlled, and neater, and the Rothschild Pentateuch appears extravagant and sketchy in comparison. If anything, the Pawlikowski Pentateuch is stylistically closer to the Kaufmann *Mishneh Torah*, ascribed to Lorraine (northeast France) and completed in 1296, the same year as the Rothschild Pentateuch.[10] The Pawlikowski Pentateuch also shares stylistic features with some of the illuminations in the miscellany of biblical and other texts ("The Northern French Miscellany") in the British Library, which was completed in France between c. 1284 and 1298 and which also includes bestiary themes.[11]

The two Pentateuchs are volumes with similar functions, both arranged in liturgical order. Both incorporate recognizable bestiary elements. In the case of the Pawlikowski Pentateuch, these bestiary images appear alongside outright biblical text illustrations, which appear in two parallel series: *Masorah figurate* – that is, illustrative micrography – and illuminations.

Among the *Masorah figurata*, a sleeved arm and hand taking an apple from the serpent (16) illustrates the Fall in Genesis, and a *Masorah* band ending in a camel's head and forequarters (64) illustrates Eliezer's mission to find Rebekah as wife for Isaac. The latter series, the illuminations, comprise Job on the dung heap at the incipit of the Book of Job (798); the "Woman of Valor" at the beginning of Proverbs 31:10 (890); and two mourners wearing pointy hats lamenting outside the walled city of Jerusalem at the incipit of Lamentations (909). Such biblical iconography is absent from the Rothschild Pentateuch. When it comes to fabulous creatures from the bestiary tradition, the Pawlikowski Pentateuch includes not only a more recognizable siren (794), but also a centaur (shooting an arrow at a Jewish-headed and hatted dragon, 633).

Contrasting with the very proper image of noble femininity at the incipit of the "woman of valor" in Proverbs, the very improper image of the siren's wild femininity in the Haftarot section of the codex is especially striking (794/fol. 397v) (Fig. 2). Its position is also puzzling. It comes at the end of the Haftarot section of this codex, concluding the Haftarah of Machar Chodesh ("Tomorrow Is Rosh Chodesh"), which is read after the Torah portion on a Shabbat when Rosh Chodesh (a traditional women's holiday, lit. "Head of the Month") falls on a Sunday – that is, the day immediately following the Shabbat on which the reading takes place (in some years, this happens once; in some, twice; in some, not at all).

I Samuel 20:18–42 makes for a rather extraordinary Haftarah, in which the drama of the doomed relationship between Saul's son Jonathan and the future king David is played out against the seemingly incidental backdrop of the biblical observance of Rosh Chodesh. The Haftarah concludes with a touching covenant of everlasting friendship: "They kissed each other and wept together; David wept the longer [lit. 'exceeded']. Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace! We have sworn, the two of us together, in the name of God, God shall be between you and me, between my seed and your seed, forever'" (I Samuel 20:41–42). In the Pawlikowski Pentateuch, this text ending has been shaped into a

[9] Zofia Ameisenowa, "Bestiarius w Biblji hebrajskiej z XIII wieku (Studium ikonograficzne z 6 reprodukcjami)," *Miesięcznik Żydowski* 3, no. 1 (1933): 79–110. She wrote (82) that the manuscript was so fresh that it was as if it had just emerged from the illuminator's workshop. See also Shemaryahu Talmon, "A Unique Depiction of a Scene from the Book of Jonah in a 13th c. Illuminated Hebrew Manuscript," in *The Old Testament as Inspiration in Culture: International Academic Symposium*, ed. Jan Heller, Shemaryahu Talmon, Hana Hlaváčková, and Martin Prudký (Třebenice: Mlýn, 2001), 72–95.

[10] Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, David Kaufmann Collection, A 77. The date 1296 emerges from the colophon on the last page, vol. 4, fol. 168v. See Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, "The Illuminated Pages of the Kaufmann Mishneh Torah," in *Codex Maimuni. Moses Maimonides' Code of Law: The Illuminated Pages of the Kaufmann Mishneh Torah*, ed. Alexander Scheiber (Budapest: Corvina, 1984), 27–39; Evelyn M. Cohen, "The Artist of the Kaufmann Mishneh Torah," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9 (1985): 25–30. See also Bezalel Narkiss and Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *Index of Jewish Art: Iconographical Index of Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*, Vol. 4: *Illuminated Manuscripts of the Kaufmann Collection* (Budapest: Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities; Paris: Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes, 1988), card nos. 1–45 (First Kaufmann *Mishneh Torah*); and the 2008 online publication of these documents at http://kaufmann.mtak.hu/index-en.html (accessed on 13 July 2023).

[11] British Library, Add. 11639. See Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, "The Paintings of the London Miscellany," *Journal of Jewish Art* 9 (1982): 18–30; Jeremy Schonfield, *The North French Hebrew Miscellany* (*British Library, Add. MS. 11639*) (London: Facsimile Editions, 2003); Sara Offenberg, *Illuminated Piety: Pietistic Texts and Images in the North French Hebrew Miscellany* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2013); Sara Offenberg, "Mirroring Samson the Martyr: Reflections of Jewish – Christian Relations in the North French Hebrew Illuminated Miscellany," in *Jews and Christians in Thirteenth-Century France*, ed. Elisheva Baumgarten and Judah Galinsky (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 203–216.

Fig. 2. Library of the National Ossoliński Institute of Poland, Wrocław, Ms. Pawl. 141,fol. 397v

descending triangle. Flanking it and filling two triangular squinches, an illuminated narrative composition moves from right to left. At the extreme right, a fortified city bristles with fully armed soldiers whose heads are protected by helmets. These defenders of the city launch spears toward the right; there, below the city walls, we see a ship about to lay anchor. Its main sail is being hauled in, a barge lowered; at the same time, a diminutive crossbowman shoots an arrow – not at the city but toward the left.[12] The transparent, roiling blue sea teems with large and small fish and eels. Following the line of the arrow, and the movement of the swimming fish below, near the opposite seashore (note the tree) in the left triangular squinch, a mermaid rears her upper body from the waves, clutching a human-headed and fish-bodied merbaby to her breast in her right arm and extending an unidentified greenish object (a plant?) with her left hand, as if to tempt the sailors at whom she appears to smile. Her beautiful long hair falls down to her waist, which is where her human upper body abruptly transitions to that of a fish.[13] But that is not all. A lower register frames the large *explicit* "be strong and let us be strengthened," which is customarily inscribed at the conclusion of biblical books. Below these words, two fierce wolf-like creatures attack a resting or sleeping stag, which lacks the very strength he needs to escape his attackers. Why is the peaceful stag attacked by beasts? Is it a way of anticipating Jonathan's later tragic fate (which is not narrated in the Haftarah)? Or does it amplify the violence in the main picture, where soldiers attack mariners and mariners attack the siren? And why should the bond between two young men be illustrated by a siren and a hunt?

Shemaryahu Talmon has sought to solve this iconographic riddle by reinterpreting the scene as an illustration from the Book of Jonah. But his reading is based on a number of factual misreadings of the miniature. Thus, far from "lowering or throwing a not identifiable object into the water,"[14] the sailors on the right have launched a barge in preparation for landing, as is consistent with the simultaneous lowering of the anchor. Talmon's "sea monster with its identifying winding tail" is actually two creatures, a large fish and an eel or sea snake. And it is doubtful too that the siren is meant to be a "second representation of the frightful big fish" in the Book of Jonah. It seems to me that Talmon's Midrashic explanations are a classic case of Midrash being allowed to overpower the image. Instead, we need to acknowledge and work with the strange imagery before us in this siren scene – a scene so reminiscent of, yet distinct from, the known depictions of sirens in the Gothic period. Instead of seeking a simple illustrative text – image relationship, can we perhaps read text and image polyphonically?[15]

Inspired by Anna Zayaruznaya's research on the medieval musical form of the motet, which from the thirteenth century onward pioneered polyphonic song compositions, Sarah Kay proposed a layered, polyphonic reading of illuminated manuscripts.[16] In her research on the depiction of the siren's song in medieval literature and art, Kay took inspiration from the way in which multiple melodies and meanings can coexist:

> Instead of combining the voices of the page together, one separates them into distinct tracks, the singing of the psalms in one and the siren song in another. The page, in this case, would become the visual correlate of an acoustic motet in which contrasting languages and ethics intertwine simultaneously but separately from one another, in a hybridity that musicologist Anna Zayaruznaya has compared with that of a siren or chimera.[17]

[12] This personage was interpreted as a horn-blower by Talmon, "A Unique Depiction," 78. I do not see any sailors lancing spears, as Talmon asserts. But perhaps he read the fortified city and its defenders as being part of the ship.

[13] "The almost full-page panel at the end of the Haftarot is divided into to [sic] compartments. The lower part contains the words חזק ונתחזק decorated below with a hunting scene depicting a lioness (right) and wolf (left) bitting [sic] a hunted stag. The upper compartment depicting on the right a sailing ship with soldiers. The one at the front is casting the anchor into the sea, another is shooting an arrow from a bow. In the background a group of soldiers dropping spears. On the left is a mermaid sitting on the waves breastfeeding a fish and holding an unidentified object in her left hand. The sea is full of fish and eels." See Bezalel Narkiss Index of Jewish Art (Center for Jewish Art, 1995), image 13178, http://cja.huji.ac.il/?mode=alone&id=13178 (accessed on 13 July 2023). This description elides the ship's crew with the city's army.

[14] Talmon, "A Unique Depiction," 82.

[15] For polyphonic reading, see Susan Boynton, Sarah Kay, Alison Cornish, and Andrew Albin, "Sound Matters," *Speculum* 91, no. 4 (2016): 998–1039; and Sarah Kay, "Siren Enchantments, or, Reading Sound in Medieval Books," *SubStance* 49, no. 2 (2020): 108–132, here 128.

[16] Anna Zayaruznaya, *The Monstrous New Art: Divided Forms in the Late Medieval Motet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Especially relevant are the sections "Theorizing Sirens and Chimeras" (99–102) and "Ut Pictura Motetus" (103–105) in chapter 2.

[17] Kay, "Siren Enchantments," 115.

In Kay's reading, polyphonic means *inter alia* the holding in suspense of several, even contradictory, layers of meaning in a given artifact. For our purposes, polyphonic reading enables the consideration of several possible interpretations without either endorsing or jettisoning any one of them. Different historical readers can thus be thought of as interpreting words and images in different ways at different times or even at the same time. So a rabbinical scholar, a Jewish layman, or a Jewish woman could all have brought different layers of meaning to an artifact, and so can we. The colorful *marginalia* in a medieval manuscript can then speak in several voices to us. They can be both decorative and reinforcing of a social order for some interpreters, while they can be subversive for others.

The Siren's Iconography

Both the Rothschild and the Pawlikowski Pentateuch's depictions of sirens are recognizable as such but unusual in their iconography. The Rothschild siren is a classic *marginalia* image from the heyday of marginal imagery:[18] a startling combination of expected elements (the fish-tail; the mirror) and unexpected ones (the concealment of the upper body, the short hair, resulting in the image of a siren-child rather than a siren-woman;[19] the attacking dog). Its success as a "grotesque" lay in its distortion of a conventional image without losing its referentiality.

The Pawlikowski siren is also part of a composition that frames the text, although in a different format. It too presents something unexpected: a reversal of the narrative bestiary theme of sirens overpowering a ship's crew by means of their seductive, soporific song. Instead, we see an alert ship's crew ready to fight back as a crossbowman takes aim at the siren. Meanwhile, the theme of a ship casting anchor beneath the walls of a heavily defended city takes us away from the generalized bestiary tradition and toward the "Matter of Troy" tradition within the vernacular *romans antiques* that spread from mid-twelfth-century France (Benoit de Saint Maure's *Roman de Troie*).[20] But in a Troy cycle, in which a siren could certainly be a generic representation of "the sea," the ship should be attacking the city, not the siren. This is not the place to attempt a complete parsing of the iconography, but it is worth suggesting here that this artist knowingly and playfully subverted known narrative tropes, tropes about the "power of women" and the supernatural power of faraway monsters – in this case woman-monsters or feminized monsters ("femmonsters?").

Although Homer's *Odyssey* was not directly known in the medieval Latin West, the transmuted Homeric tale about Odysseus and the sirens circulated via different transmission strands. Homeric echoes appeared in the "scientific" and moralized physiologus/bestiary texts (which were also taken up or recycled in a range of other didactic texts), in late antique commentators on classical literature (e.g., Servius's *Aeneid* commentary), and via references in patristic commentaries on biblical mistranslations of difficult passages in Isaiah (esp. 13:22) and Job (as found in the Septuagint and hence the Vulgate). Thence they found their way into medieval histories and romances. While Odysseus in Homer outsmarts the birdwomen, in the Latin physiologus/bestiary traditions the sirens succeed in wrecking ships, the only known defense against perdition being to stop one's ears. The sirens' vocal threat was Christianized to warn against the corruptions of worldly pleasures – pleasures that were implicitly coded as feminine. And when the strategy of stopping one's (masculine) ears was mentioned, it was allegorized and moralized (flee the blandishments of the world/devil to save your soul).

The ruse of stopping one's ears was transmitted as an allegory for the Christian's self-removal from worldly temptations. Isidor of Seville's encyclopedia, the *Etymologiae*, is a good example of the didactic literature that contained such techniques:

> People imagine three Sirens who were part maidens, part birds, having wings and talons; one of them would

[18] Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992); Madeline H. Caviness, "(En) gendering Marginalia in Books for Men and Women," in *Art and Symbolism Pre-Printed Papers*, Vol. 7: *A Conference on Medieval Archaeology, 21st–24th September 1992 at the University of York* (York: Society for Medieval Archaeology, 1993), 97–102; Madeline H. Caviness, "Patron or Matron? A Capetian Bride and a Vade Mecum for Her Marriage Bed," *Speculum* 68, no. 2 (1993): 333–362; Kathryn A. Smith, "Margin," in *Medieval Art History Today: Critical Terms*, ed. Nina Rowe (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 2012), 29–44.

[19] As in the semi-nude woman-siren with hand mirror and comb in the Luttrell Psalter, England, second quarter of the fourteenth century; British Library, Add. 42130, fol. 70v.

[20] Sirens approaching Odysseus's ship in the *Roman de Troie* (*Romance of Troy*) by Benoît de Sainte-Maure; illuminator Turlon, 1340–1350 in Venice or Padua, parchment (335 × 240 mm), Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 112 (3), http://expositions.bnf.fr/fantasy/en/grand/fan_001.php (accessed on 13 July 2023); Patricia M. Gathercole, "Illuminations on the BN Manuscripts of the Romance of Troy," *Romance Notes* 16, no. 2 (1975): 430–438.

> make music with her voice, the second with a flute, and the third with a lyre. They would draw sailors, enticed by the song, into shipwreck.[21]

The avian nature of sirens was widely ignored, and illustrations randomly used fish-tailed sirens. The Berne/Brussels version of the *Physiologus* builds a bridge between patristic commentaries on Isaiah and the physiologus tradition:

> On sirens and onocentaurs: The prophet Isaiah says [XIII, 22]: "sirens and demons danced in Babylon …" The *Physiologus* treats their nature. Sirens, he says, are death-bringing creatures, which have the shape of a man from the head to the navel. The extremities down to the feet are those in the shape of a bird. And they sing a melodious and most sweet song: so that, by the sweetness of the voice, they soften and attract the hearing of distant seafaring men, and delight the ears by the utter modulation of sweetness, and they put to sleep their enjoying senses. Then, when they see them in deep sleep, they attack suddenly and tear their flesh apart; and thus they deceive and put to death by means of persuasion the ignorant and careless men. Those then are deceived who delight in the delights and displays and theatres and enjoyments, that is, lose themselves in comedies and diverse musical melodies, and as if they put to deep sleep the entire vigour of their mind; and immediately they completely fall prey to the enemies of the virtues [i.e., the vices].[22]

Despite the verbal description of the siren's fishy lower half, the Berne illustration shows a sea snake from the navel down. This essay is less concerned, however, with the historical transformation of the Homeric avian siren into a human–fish *mixtum*, and more with the textual and visual trope of sirens and ships, especially the sirens' capacity to wreck ships by enchanting mariners through their song. But before getting to that point, let me briefly argue that there is little point trying to distinguish sirens from mermaids in this period. The pre-Chaucerian term, *mermin*, derived from Old English *męremęnen*, from *męre* "sea" + *męnen* "female slave," and the Old High German *merimenni* were both used as terms referring to the siren; *siren* and *mermin*/*merimenni* were widely perceived as interchangeable.[23] From their earliest occurrences, *merimenni* and *mermin* were used to gloss the foreign term *siren*, whether in biblical glossaries[24] or in vernacular versions of bestiaries.[25] As *merwîp* and *merminne*, they also appear in epics to denote female water sprites, sometimes mature ones endowed with prophetic wisdom (*Nibelungenlied*, *Rabenschlacht*). The mermaid – siren distinction is thus a false one.

In German-speaking lands, the Latin bestiary was not copied as much as it was in England. Instead, earlier Latin paraphrases of the Greek *Physiologus* circulated there, namely the *Dicta Chrysostomy*

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[21] Isidor of Seville, *Etymologiae* XI.3.30–31: "Sirenas tres fingunt fuisse ex parte virgines, ex parte volucres, habentes alas et úngulas. Quarum una voce, altera tibiis, tertia lyra canebat. Quae inlectos navigantes sub cantu in naufragium trahebant. Secundum veritatem autem meretrices fuerunt, quae, transeúntes quoniam deducebant ad his fictae sunt inferre naufragia. Alas autem habuisse et úngulas, quia amor et volât et vulnerat. Quae hide in fluctibus commorasse dicuntur, quia fluctus Venerem creaverunt."

[22] "De syrenis et onocentauris. Isaias propheta dicit [xiii, 22]: Syrenae et daemonia saltabunt in Babylone, et herinatii et honocentauri habitabunt in domibus eorum. Uniuscujusque naturam Physiologus disseruit. Syrenae, inquit, animalia mortífera sunt, quae a capite usque ad umbilicum figuram hominis habent ; extremas vero partes usque ad pedes volatílis habent figuram. Et musicum [musicam] quoddam ac dulcissimum mélodie carmen canentia: ita ut, per suavitatem vocis, auditus hominum a longe navigantium mulceant et ad se trahant, ac nimia suavitatis modulatione perlectant aures, ac sensus eorum delectantes in somno vertant. Tum demum, quum viderint eos in gravi somno, subito invadunt et dilaniant carnes eorum; ac sic persuasione vocis ignaros et incautos s homines decipiunt et mortificant. Sic igitur decipiuntur qui in deliciis et pompis et teatribus ac voluptatibus delectantur, id est comediis et tragediis ac diversis musicis melodiis dissoluti, (et) velut in somno grave totum mentis vigorem amittunt; et subito efficiuntur adversariorium virtutum avidissime praede." See Edmond Faral, "La queue de poisson des sirens," *Romania* 74, no. 296 (1953): 433–506, here 438–439, based on the edition of Charles Cahier and Arthur Martin, *Mélanges d'archéologie, d'histoire et de littérature* 2 (1851), 85. Interestingly, the English thirteenth-century "second-family" bestiary, British Library, Harley 4751, fol. 47v, omits the biblical prooftext entirely, as if to cater to a more secular audience; see https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley_ms_4751_f047v (accessed on 13 July 2023) for the text and the very interesting image with the man stopping his ears not underwritten by this text.

[23] Dana Oswald, "Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (London: Routledge, 2016), 343–363, here 352.

[24] Biblical references to "sirens" in Isaiah 13:21 (*ya'anah* (יְעֲנָה)) were translated as *sirens* by the Septuagint and Vulgate. See Valentine A. Pakis, "Contextual Duplicity and Textual Variation: The Siren and Onocentaur in the Physiologus Tradition," *Mediaevistik* 23 (2010): 115–185, here 126, n. 40, referencing *Die althochdeutschen Glossen*, ed. Frederika Bain, Elias von Steinmeyer, and Eduard Sievers (Berlin: Weidmann, 1879), 602.

[25] The Old High German *Physiologus* "Reda umbe diu tier," Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 223 of the eleventh century, probably from Hirsau Monastery, glosses the siren entry: "Sirêne sínt méremanniu." See photograph of the page and transcription available at http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/germ/ahd/physiold/physi.htm?physi005.htm (accessed on 13 July 2023), which shows Middle English *mereman* in a vernacular (English) bestiary, c. 1275–1300, British Library, Arundel 292 fol. 8v., where

(originally written in Carolingian France) and the metrical *Physiologus* by Theobald (an eleventh-century cleric who most likely lived in Northern Italy).[26] The rhymed vernacular (German-language) *Physiologus* in the Millstatt codex was illustrated with rapid pen drawings around 1200.[27] Other versions were distributed in France, and led to vernacular rewritings.[28] The sirens did not long remain enclosed in the ivory tower of (male) monastic and clerical culture.[29] In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, vernacular-language bestiaries – some of which were highly inventive allegorical compositions that straddled the religious – secular divide – were written specifically for a secular, non-Latinate audience (and may therefore implicitly or indirectly have also been open to a Jewish audience).[30] Perhaps the growth of vernacular French bestiaries is the key to understanding the sirens in the two illuminated Hebrew Pentateuchs under discussion in this essay.

In the first half of the twelfth century, the Norman cleric Philippe de Thaon (or Thaun) composed the rhymed *Bestiaire* (after 1121), the first French translation of the *Physiologus*. In Philippe's version, the "siren haunts the sea / she sings against the tempest / she cries in fine weather … she is made like a woman / down to the waist / she has falcon feet and a fish's tail."[31] Philippe goes on to describe how she makes any mariners fall asleep by her song and thereby makes ships crash. The reader is then enjoined to remember the significance of the siren, but between the description and its moralization Philippe planned an image, for which he provided a Latin rubric: "Here be depicted a siren with a woman's face down to the navel, and feathers and feet like a bird, and a fish tail." Then follows the French moralization: the siren signifies the riches of the world; the sea is the world; the ship symbolizes people but also "the heart which has to swim"; and the mariner is the soul. The riches of the world make the soul fall asleep in sin – an anti-secular diatribe (ironic in a text dedicated to Adela of Louvain, the wife of King Henry I of England). What interests me is that the author planned illustrations and composed Latin rubrics identifying the subjects. This particular rubric seems to make no provision for a narrative scene – only the siren is described.

Allegorical and playful texts such as Richard de Fournival's *Bestiaire d'amour*, in which the beloved lady is compared to an elusive siren, became great successes (and were also illustrated). This book was also translated into German as early as the thirteenth century. In Gottfried of Strassburg's *Tristan*, Isolde is the ultimate siren (anticipating the disastrous ending), while in his

it translates the term as *siren*. See "Natura Sirene" ["The Mermaid"], in *An Old English Miscellany containing a Bestiary, Kentish Sermons, Proverbs of Alfred, Religious Poems of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Richard Morris (London: N. Trübner, 1872), 18–19. For the rhymed vernacular (German-language) illustrated *Physiologus*, the Millstatt codex Klagenfurt, Kärntner Landesarchiv, Geschichtsverein, Cod. 6/19, fol. 84v–101r (c. 1200), see *Der altdeutsche Physiologus: Die Millstätter Reimfassung und die Wiener Prosa* (*nebst dem lateinischen Text und dem althochdeutschen Physiologus*), ed. Friedrich Maurer (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967), 91–95.

[26] Alan Wood Rendell, *Physiologus: A Metrical Bestiary of Twelve Chapters by Bishop Theobald* (London: Bumpus, 1928), 87 (Siren and Onocentaur); Carolynn Van Dyke, "Women and Other Beasts: A Feminist Perspective on Medieval Bestiaries," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 54, no. 1 (2018): 94–117, here 107–108; Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-Family Bestiary: Commentary, Art, Text and Translation* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2006), 114; Nikolaus Henkel, *Studien zum Physiologus im Mittelalter* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1976), 29–42, 110–128; Graeme Dunphy, "Physiologus," in *Medieval Germany: An Encyclopedia*, ed. John M. Jeep (New York: Garland, 2001), 616–617.

[27] Klagenfurt, Kärntner Landesarchiv, Geschichtsverein, Cod. 6/19, fol. 84v–101r. Parchment, 167 folios, 199×122 mm, c. 1200 or early thirteenth century. See https://handschriftencensus.de/1481 (accessed on 13 July 2023) for further description and bibliography (text edited by Friedrich Maurer).

[28] Florence McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Sarah Kay, *Animal Skins and the Reading Self in Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[29] See Van Dyke, "Women and Other Beasts," 98–100, for a review of the almost exclusively male institutional ownership of bestiaries. But she goes on (101–102) to espouse Clark's view that bestiaries (also) had a place in lay education.

[30] Guillaume le Clerc, *Le Bestiaire: Das Thierbuch des Normannischen Dichters Guillaume le Clerc*, ed. Robert Reinsch (Leipzig: Riesland, 1892), 268–270 (lines 1053–1112, which are available below as Appendix A). Kay, "Siren Enchantments," 110–111, gives the following partial summary: "Most beautiful creatures imaginable from the waist up but from the waist down are like either fish or birds. They sing so beautifully that they charm sailors until they fall asleep […], whereupon the sirens fall upon and kill them without their victims uttering a word. The sailors are humans on the sea of life who are so deceived by the charm of song, and by other vainglories and pleasures, that they are as if asleep; in this unguarded state, the devil assails them and leads them to damnation." Note that the text is moralized in a general rather than a religiously specific way.

[31] Philippe de Thaon, *Bestiaire*, verses 1109–1132, 1361–1414: "Serena en mer ante, / cuntre tempeste chante / e plurë en bel tens, / itels est sis talens; / e de femme ad faiture / entresque la ceinture. / eles, pez de falcun I e cue de peissun. / Quant se volt dejüer / dunc

prologue the poet prays to the "nine sirens," whom he equates with the Camenes, a version of the Muses.[32]

Whether Latin or vernacular, bestiaries, their translations, and their allegorical recompositions were often copied in illustrated or illuminated manuscripts, so that images of animals and fabulous creatures circulated with the texts.[33] In these illuminated bestiaries, the siren never fails to appear, either in a quasi-heterosexual pairing with the onocentaur (sometimes the latter is furnished with a bow and arrow while the siren is given a mirror and comb), or shown threatening or wrecking a ship. The latter representation can be regarded as a conventional iconography, although there does not appear to be an absolutely fixed pictorial formula: the enchantment of the boat's or ship's crew can be shown by diverse means (one or more sirens, singing and/or playing instruments, or merely rearing up out of the waves) and in various stages (the crew more or less asleep; the boat or ship afloat, foundering, or sinking; the sirens about to board, hitting seamen with their instruments or dragging seamen overboard).[34]

Bestiary imagery also escaped their books into architectural sculpture and the portable arts. Siren images were transferred, together with a range of other bestiary images, into the *marginalia* of Christian prayer books.[35] Either they appear in non-narrative isolation, scattered among other fabulous creatures or paired with the onocentaur, or they are shown enchanting or wrecking a ship. The iconographic conceit of a siren or sirens wrecking a ship was conventional, even canonical, but the exact iconographic formula (which narrative moment is shown) was fluid.[36] Within the trope of sirens wrecking ships, the painters seem to have had some leeway, sometimes merely alluding to the well-known gruesome narrative by showing sirens near a ship.

The sirens' significance in prayer books is, however, ambiguous. On one level, they can be read as part of

chante alt e cler; / si dunc I'ot notuniers / ki najant [vait] par mers, / la nef met en ubli, / senes est endormi. / Aiez en remembrance, / ceö est signefiance. [Hic serena pingitur et facies eius ut mulieris usque ad umbilicum, pennas et pedes volucris habens et caudam piscis.] … Les seraines k'i sunt / richeises sunt del mund; / la mer mustre cest mund, / la nef gent ki i sunt, / e I'aneme est notuner, / nef cors que deit nager. / Sacez maintes faiz funt / Les richeises del mund / L'anme e le cors pecher / - ceo est nef e notuner- / l'anme en pechét dormir, / ensurquetut perir. / Les richeises del munt / mult grant merveil[e] funt, / es parolent e volent, / par pez prennent e noënt; / pur ceo de tel façun / les sereines peignum: / li riches hom parole, de lui la fame vole, / e les povres destreint, e noë quant se faint. [Hic reddit racionem quare serena gaudet in tempestate.] SERENE est de itel estre / qu'ele cante en tempeste; / ceo fait richeise el mund / quant riche home cunfunt / - Ceo est canter en tempestes / quant richesce est sis maistres - / quë hum pur li se pent / e ocit a turment. / La sereine en bel tens / plurë et plaint tut tens: / quand hum dune richeise / e pur Deu la despreise, / lores est bel[ë] ore / e la richeise plure. / Sacez ceo signefie / richeise en ceste vie." For this text, I have used Philippe de Thaon, *Bestiaire*, ed. Luigina Morini (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2018), 170–171. On the crucial didactic function of illustrations (with Latin rubrics), see 23–38; on the manuscripts, see 53–64. Another edition – but without the Latin rubrics! – is *Philippe de Thaon*, *Bestiaire*, ed. *Ian Short* (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2018), 48–49.

[32] Referencing Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* (where the sirens are negative characters expelled by Lady Philosophy!), Tobias Bulang, in *guldîne linge: Fünf Essays zu Gottfrieds Tristan* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2021), 9, refers to "Gottfrieds sirenische Ästhetik.".

[33] Debra Higgs Strickland, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Ron Baxter, *Bestiaries and Their Users in the Middle Ages* (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 1998); Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*; Elizabeth Morrison and Larisa Grollemond, eds., *Book of Beasts: The Bestiary in the Medieval World* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2019).

[34] See Appendix C for a list of relevant manuscripts in French.

[35] Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Gall. 16 (French Psalter of Isabelle of France), fol. 18r: two singing sirens, one male one female, attack a boat full of sleepers. The rubricated French text above the image speaks of flying *cherubim* flying on the wings of the winds. More research is needed here; see https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb00056556?page=,1 (accessed on 13 July 2023); Queen Mary Psalter (1310–1320), British Library, Royal Ms 2.B.vii, fols 96v–97r, narrating in two instalments: on the left, the sirens (one holding a mirror) singing next to a ship and beginning to send to sleep some of the crew; on the right, the sirens are attacking the sleeping inmates of the ship. It is part of an entire bestiary cycle in margins over many pages. The bridge between genres may be represented by the Peterborough Psalter, Chronicle, and Bestiary. Corpus Christi College Parker Library, Ms 53, fol. 201v: one siren is holding up two fish to a boatful of men. However, this illuminated bestiary of c. 1300 was bound with the slightly later psalter when both entered Peterborough Abbey in the early fourteenth century. Nevertheless, the combination shows that they were deemed to be compatible books; see https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/gs233db8425 (accessed on 13 July 2023).

[36] Nordic and English examples: Arnamagnæanske Institut, Ms AM 673 a 4º (Icelandic *Physiologus*), c. 1200, fol. 1v: androgynous siren threatening a ship full of heavily armed soldiers; Bodleian Library, Bodley 764 (England, c. 1225–1250) folio 74v: three sirens are about to board a ship with three sleeping sailors; Cambridge University Library, Kk.4.25 (England, 1220–1240), third family. fol. 77r: three fully dressed women-centaurs with wings play music opposite a ship full of sleepers; British Library, Harley 4751 (England, Salisbury?), c. 1230–1240, f. 47v: a fish-tailed siren is sinking a ship while one of the mariners stops his ears (see https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_4751 (accessed

an iconography that was meant to control women's desires by showing female sexuality in a threatening, moralizing light.[37] On another level, because the psalter is a book to be chanted, and because the images often appear close to texts explicitly calling upon the reader to sing, the sirens could be read as prompts to chant.[38] We can develop and combine these possibilities in a gendered reading of the two Hebrew Pentateuchs, which also prominently feature prompts to chant.

Alongside the shipwreck topos, there are frequent images of maternal sirens breastfeeding their young (miniature sirens, tritons, or even fish). These images were carved into architectural sculptures and painted in the margins of prayer books, where they seem to alternate randomly with depictions of sirens as *luxuria* with mirror (and sometimes comb).[39] Both the mirror/*luxuria* and the nursing iconography draw attention to female sexuality, but also to breastfeeding and wet nursing as a contested field of social control.[40]

These texts (and their illustrations) were part of a moralizing tradition that included lessons about the dangers posed by women, a tradition that, although part of a Christianized bestiary, became generalized enough to be adopted by Jews alongside their own, rabbinic bestiary traditions.[41] But sirens are not women – they are *mixta*, they are monstrous.

The Siren's Voice

Like Christian prayer books, Hebrew liturgical Pentateuchs were meant to be heard, not just seen. And unlike psalters and books of hours, liturgical Pentateuchs are not only arranged in the order of performance (of the right texts at the right liturgical times), but also furnished with the notes needed for such performance. The Rothschild and Pawlikowski Pentateuchs, like other liturgical Pentateuchs, contain a consonantal text vocalized and furnished with the cantillation marks (cantorial notes) that make its correct chanting possible.

In such a performative context, sirens may be read as figures of the sound of manuscripts and as prompts for chanting. As Kay proposed:

> Sirens … epitomize the medieval page, foreground the embodiment of both reader and book, and help us apprehend an auditory imagination, a concept often

on 13 July 2023)); Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 14969 (England, c. 1260–1270) (*Bestiaire* of Guillaume le Clerc), folio 21r: a siren wielding two fish rears up in front of a ship and a boat, whose boatman is already asleep; British Library, Sloane 3544 (England, late thirteenth century), second family bestiary folio 28v: siren holds up two fish while two cowled men sleep in the boat; Corpus Christi College Parker Library, Ms 53 (the Peterborough Psalter, Chronicle, and Bestiary) folio 201v: a siren holds up two fish to a boatful of men (bestiary part). And an Italian example: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 2843E Latin Bestiary, Bologna, late thirteenth century, folio 67r: there is a boat with one man touched by a siren, who seems to be in the boat, and we only see her nude female upper body; another woman's head appears in the waves.

37 Madeline H. Caviness, *Reframing Medieval Art: Difference, Margins, Boundaries* (2001), chapter 3. The e-book is available at https://dca.lib.tufts.edu/caviness/ accessed on 13 July 2023).

38 This prompting is already present in the earliest psalter with fully developed *marginalia*, the Rutland Psalter, British Library, Add. 62925 (England, c. 1260) fol. 76r: two male sirens are holding a fish; fol. 96r: a siren in the waves, with outstretched arms, appears beneath "Cantate domino canticum novum. Cantate domino omnis terra (!)." Another siren on fol. 108v curls up its tail in sciapod fashion, attacked by a semi-nude rider armed with a club on a hybrid creature. See Nigel Morgan, "The Artists of the Rutland Psalter," *British Library Journal* 13, no. 2 (1987): 159–185, digitized on http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_62925_fs001r (accessed on 13 July 2023). The best-known prayer-book example of sirens wrecking a ship is the shipwreck sequence in the Queen Mary Psalter (1310–1320), British Library, Royal 2.B.vii, fol. 96v–97r. However, in the same psalter sirens appear elsewhere: fol. 135v: a siren lances a centaur off his horse-body; fol. 191r: a siren is playing flute and harp, and holding a mirror. See Kay, "Siren Enchantments," 108–132, with further literature.

39 See, for example, in the margin of the Prince Alphonso Psalter, British Library, Add. 24686, fol. 13r (England, 1284–1316), https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_24686_f013r (accessed on 13 July 2023), where the siren baby is a miniature grown-up with long hair and fully developed breast(s). This psalter was made as a princely wedding present, and the marriage context here seems to be relevant to the iconographic program. For the broader phenomenon of the breastfeeding siren in art, see Jacqueline Leclercq-Marx, "Du monstre androcéphale au monstre humanisé: à propos des sirènes et des centaures, et de leur famille, dans le haut Moyen Age et à l'époque romane," *Cahiers de civilisation medievale* 45, no. 177 (2002): 55–67, who suggests that the development of the maternal siren owes much to cultural cross-pollination with Nordic mythological water creatures.

40 Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 119–153; Maria Diemling, "Navigating Christian Space: Jews and Christian Images in Early Modern German Lands," *Jewish Culture and History* 12, no. 3 (2012): 397–410. Both cite the perceived dangers of Christian wet-nurses singing Christian lullabies to their Jewish nurslings and also the attempts to curb this seductive singing, referring to *Sefer Hasidim*. See Judith R. Baskin, "From Separation to Displacement: The Problem of Women in *Sefer Hasidim*," *AJS Review* 19, no. 1 (1994): 1–18.

41 Ariel Toaff, *Mostri guidei: l'immaginario ebraico dal Medioevo alla prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996); Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Jacob Neusner, "Bestiary, Rabbinic," in *The Encyclopaedia of Judaism*, ed.

> struggling for recognition alongside its visual counterpart but vital if we are to "hear" a book's represented or implied soundtrack.[42]

Sirens singing or playing instruments, alongside other music-making, noise-making, or sound-producing figures, are often found in the margins of prayer books that were intended to be chanted, sung, or performed.[43]

Hebrew liturgical Pentateuchs were even more performative (through the inclusion of pronunciation and cantillation marks) than Christian books of hours. Yet paradoxically, they were not used by the prayer leader for public performance, which has to take place from an unvocalized, unannotated, uncantillated, and unadorned scroll. Sarit Shalev-Eyni has already reminded us in the context of *mahzorim* (festival prayer books) that "the voices emerging from churches and synagogues expressed different vocal esthetics."[44] But whose voices were to be heard? Around 1300, in Jewish public liturgical performance, these voices were strictly gendered, but in a different way from Christian devotional performance, in which illuminated prayer books served a new audience of individuals, often women. The Jewish communal performance was contingent on the presence of ten adult men – no such thing as a lone priest chanting the service alone, or a congregation of nuns or an individual praying alone. (When Jewish women assembled for prayer under a woman prayer leader, they did not constitute a quorum.)[45] And it was exclusively men's voices that were to be heard in public performance. Women did pray, and occupied the women's prayer spaces, but even when these spaces were contiguous with the main (i.e., the men's) prayer hall, the voices raised inside the women's prayer spaces were all but inaudible in the men's prayer hall. The liturgy was performed in a homosocial and a homomusical communal space.[46]

Women were certainly excluded by the sages from leading prayers and from the public chanting of the Torah.[47] It is not just that women were not called up to read the Torah, although they qualified in theory. It is also that the woman's voice (*kol ishah*) was deeply problematic in rabbinic culture, since the voice was regarded as an integral part of a woman's (sexualized) body. It is as if a woman's voice was a form of nakedness, comparable to a woman's hair. To see how the argument worked, consider a Talmudic sequence about not saying the Shema in bed when sharing the bed with another naked person; the sequences lead to a competitive rabbinic disquisition on women's nudity:

> Anyone who gazes upon a woman's little finger is considered as if he is gazing upon her genitals. … Rav Hisda said: "A woman's leg is nakedness", as it is stated: "Uncover the leg and pass through the rivers" (Isaiah 47:2), and it is written: "Your nakedness shall be revealed and your shame shall be seen" (Isaiah 47:3). Samuel stated: "A woman's voice is nakedness", as it is stated: "Sweet is your voice and your countenance is alluring" (Song of

Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck, and William Scott Green, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 179–193; David I. Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His Wonders: Nature and the Supernatural in Medieval Ashkenaz* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

42 Kay, "Siren Enchantment," 110.

43 Sarit Shalev-Eyni, "The Aural-Visual Experience in the Ashkenazi Ritual Domain of the Middle Ages," in *Clothing Sacred Scriptures: Book Art and Book Religion in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Cultures*, ed. David Ganz and Barbara Schellewald (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 283–295.

44 Ibid., 293.

45 Ibid., 294. In the following quote from Shalev-Eyni's conclusion, gender is not really considered: "The aural dimension of the images was based on quotations from the liturgy, which were written in banderoles incorporated within those images. They turned the visual expression into an aural-visual event in which the biblical narrative and the liturgical present were already integrated in the illumination. The result empowered the dramatic dimension of the public ritual and intensified the sensorial involvement of the users of the books in the ceremonies. When such images were depicted in ritual books intended for use at home, their aural-visual dimension had the ability to carry the public experience into the private ritual domain, allowing the individuals and families celebrating that ritual to identify with the whole community and its public liturgical space." But we have to ask who the users of illuminated *mahzorim* were – men; who was sufficiently educated to read the banderoles; how the "public experience" (=men's experience) and the public liturgical space (=occupied by men) was gendered; and how the "whole community" was differentiated in gendered roles.

46 Judith Ann Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), chapter 4.

47 "The Sages taught [in t. *Megillah* 3:5]: All count toward the quorum of seven [Torah readers], even a minor and even a woman. However, the Sages said that a woman should not read the Torah, out of respect for the congregation" (BT *Megillah* 23a). T *Megillah* 3:5, the source of this Talmudic passage, omits the reason that women, despite being eligible, do not get called up to read from the Torah: "On Yom Tov five [read from the Torah], on Yom Kippur six, and on Shabbat seven. [Even] if they wanted to add, they may not add: the words of Rabbi Yishmael. Rabbi Akiva says, on Yom Tov five, on Yom Kippur six, and on Shabbat seven, and if they wanted to add, they may add. Everyone counts toward the quorum of seven [readers], even a woman, even a minor. [However,] we do not bring up a woman to read in public."

> Songs 2:14).[48] Rav Sheshet stated: "A woman's hair is nakedness", as it is written: "Your hair is like a flock of goats" (Song of Songs 4:1).[49]

The little finger – the leg – the voice – the hair: the Talmudic sages Rav Hisda,[50] Samuel,[51] and Rav Sheshet[52] vie with each other in a quintessentially masculine game of exegetical one-upmanship to find limiting cases of what may distract a man from concentrating on the recitation of the bedtime Shema. (The question is not posed about women's recitation of the Shema.) Therefore, the siren must not be allowed to sing. And yet plenty of the siren's nakedness is visible to the user(s) of the Pawlikowski Pentateuch. As Kay put it: "Sirens can readily be seen as having too much body, or too many kinds of body in too many places – on the earth (as women), in the water (as fish), and in the air (as birds)."[53] The silent siren's terrifying vocal powers are hinted at by that which is visible: her hair and her nudity. In the Pawlikowski Pentateuch, the siren's mouth appears to be closed. Her voice is not heard. But her face, hair, and upper body speak. Meanwhile, the mariners launch an attack on her, presumably to be understood as a defensive action. Her weapon is her beauty and her monstrosity, the seafarers' weapons are military, even phallic (crossbow and arrow, spear, anchor). Madeline Caviness has written apropos of the siren's beauty:

> Many of the female grotesques favored in men's books evoke a literary context, whether biblical (the woman-headed serpent) or Classical (sirens); their nude torsos may appeal to the eye, but a knowledge of the text (and consideration of their tails) will protect the viewer from their allure.[54]

The Hebrew liturgical Pentateuchs were men's books par excellence. Whether or not their Jewish owners or audiences were familiar with the bestiary explanation of the siren is another matter.[55] David Shyovitz's work has uncovered the extent of creative pietistic engagement with the bestiary discourse of ancient tradition.[56] That a genre of book about animals was known in Franco-Ashkenaz is evidenced by the *Mishlei Shu'alim* (*Fox Fables*) by the thirteenth-century Norman or Anglo-Norman Berekhia ha'Naqdan (*Berechiah* ben Natronai Krespia ha-Nakdan), which are about far more than foxes. The *Mishlei Shu'alim* do not treat of the siren, but Ashkenazim were certainly familiar with the figure of the siren from rabbinic sources, as we will see shortly.

The silent but beautiful and desirable siren – the desire for whom must be violently disavowed and whose beauty must be violently resisted – finds its counterpoint in the image of the equally silent, fully veiled Eshet Chayil ("Woman of Valor") in the same codex. Not an inch of her body is seen, and her hair is invisible. This essay is not the place to discuss the "Woman of Valor," except to note that the illustrator here shows no interest in her praiseworthy actions as enumerated in the biblical Book of Proverbs. She is depicted as passive. The point of her painted gilded coronet and her gathered-up (i.e., abundant) ermine-lined mantle mark her as an aristocratic lady rather than as a woman of deeds. This was the preferred idealized model for medieval Jewish elite wives in Tzarfat and Ashkenaz. Her apparent noble, leisured status contrasts with the active, laboring (and thus potentially lower) status of the loose-haired siren who bares her breast for her offspring.[57]

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[48] The association is based on an untranslatable wordplay between the Talmud's עֶרְוָה ("nakedness," "shame") and Song of Songs' עָרֵב ("pleasant," "sweet").

[49] BT *Berakhot* 24a.

[50] Babylonian Amora (*halakha* teacher, head of *yeshivah*) of the third generation.

[51] Babylonian Amora of the first generation.

[52] Babylonian Amora of the third generation, Rav Hisda's rival.

[53] Kay, "Siren Enchantment," 115.

[54] Caviness, *Reframing Medieval Art*, chapter 3.

[55] See the translation by Moses Hadas, *Fables of a Jewish Aesop* (*New York*: Columbia University Press, *1967*); Haim Schwartzbaum, *The Mishlei Shu'alim of Rabbi Berechiah HaNakdan* (Kiron, Israel: Institution for Jewish and Arabic Folklore Research, 1979); Marc Michael Epstein, "The Elephant and the Law: The Medieval Jewish Minority Adapts a Christian Motif," *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 3 (1994): 465–478, here 470; Tamás Visi, Tovi Bibring, and Daniel Soukup, eds., *Berechiah ben Natronai ha-Naqdan's Works and Their Reception* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019). The *Mishlei Shu'alim*, being of Aesopic derivation, does not include the siren.

[56] David I. Shyovitz, "Unearthing the 'Children of Cain': Between Humans, Animals, and Demons in Medieval Jewish Culture," in *Monsters and Monstrosity in Jewish History: From the Middle Ages to Modernity*, ed. Iris Idelson-Shein and Christian Wiese (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 157–186; Shyovitz, "A Remembrance"; David I. Shyovitz, "Beauty and the Bestiary: Animals, Wonder, and Polemic in Medieval Ashkenaz," in *The Jewish – Christian Encounter in Medieval Preaching*, ed. Jonathan Adams and Jussi Hanska (London: Routledge, 2014), 215–239.

[57] However, the Pawlikowski siren is not explicitly breastfeeding the merchild, certainly not in comparison with the explicit depiction in the Prince Alphonso Psalter, British Library, Add. 24686, fol. 13r (see above, note 39).

The Siren's Seed and the Rabbinic Bestiary

Polyphonic reading means discerning not a singular meaning that harmonizes texts and images, but several simultaneously coexisting levels of disparate meaning in the texts and the images.

While the imagery of the Pawlikowski Pentateuch depicts the feminine (via the siren) as exotic, enchanted, and threatening, and being repulsed by men, and while it depicts the siren's procreative capacities (via the merchild), the text on the page, tapering in a descending triangle, speaks of the bond "between my [David's] seed and your [Jonathan's] seed in eternity." In the interstices between the text and the image, a new (musicologically speaking) counterpoint arises, comparable to late medieval motets that produced a "monstrous harmony" from simultaneous contrasting sounds.

Since we know that Jonathan died in battle soon thereafter, together with his father Saul and his brothers, and that he left behind a disabled child with no claims to the throne, what exactly was the eternal bond between David's and Jonathan's seed? What was the nature of their relationship, their love for each other, and what could their "bromance" mean in medieval Tzarfat or Ashkenaz?[58] Medieval Jewish anxieties about masculinity can also lead us to consider the siren's "seed". We see the siren clutching her offspring, a fish-bodied but human-headed baby – but how exactly does a siren procreate?

In her feminist study of bestiaries, Carolynn Van Dyke noted that, as a general rule, "bestiaries are not particularly sexy, in either sense. Copulation goes mostly unmentioned; so does the animals' biological gender."[59] The siren may be an exception to this rule. There existed a Jewish answer to the question of sirens' procreation; in fact, Jewish sources were particularly interested in procreation. In the medieval Jewish imaginary, we find an alternative bestiary hidden in the Hebrew commentaries on a particular Talmudic passage – a passage discussing a Mishnah ruling on the *kashrut* of different types of fish, which are differentiated by their modes of reproduction.[60] So procreation, specifically the procreation of fish, is at the core of the textual universe from which the Jewish siren was born.

The context is that of *kashrut*. The Mishnah (Palestine, second century) had ruled concisely on the limiting case of a "clean" fish that had swallowed an "unclean" fish, or vice versa (and which of them one may eat). The Gemarah (the Mishnah's Talmudic elaboration, composed in Babylonia over several centuries between c. 300 CE and c. 500 CE) pushes the limiting case further, worrying about the possibility that a kosher fish might spawn (rather than swallow) a non-kosher fish or vice versa, which in turn calls for a disquisition on the reproduction of fish. A Baraita (a Mishnaic-era text not included in the Mishnah but cited in the Talmud) opens the gates to an inquiry into how fish procreate:

> Our Rabbis taught [in a Baraita]: An unclean fish breeds [i.e., gives birth to live fish], but a clean fish lays eggs. Whatsoever gives birth, gives suck [breastfeeds]. And whatsoever lays eggs, gathers [food for its young], except the bat, for although it lays eggs, it gives suck [to its young]. Dolphins [דולפנין, *d-v-l-f-n-i-n*][61] are fruitful and multiply like human beings.[62]

Perhaps the Baraita merely intended to emphasize that dolphins give birth to live offspring, just like people; but the Rabbis' use of the terminology from Genesis 1:28 ("be fruitful and multiply" or "be fertile and increase"), a blessing and command given to humans rather than to other animals, was to produce in the medieval period a strange transmutation in the meaning of דולפנין. It is a Greek loanword and had already caused problems in the inland Persian towns, where the Aramaic-speaking Talmudic sages, far away from the sea and unskilled in Greek, pondered the Mishnah.[63] The Talmud, puzzled by the Mishnah-era Greek loanword furnished with an

[58] For the notion of bromance, see Eyal Levinson, "'Eternal Love I Conceive for You': Traveling Jewish Men and Covenantal Bromances," *Mittelalter: Interdisziplinäre Forschung und Rezeptionsgeschichte* 3 (2020): 1–13, on the basis of Ruth Mazo Karras, "David and Jonathan: A Late Medieval Bromance," in *Rivalrous Masculinities: New Directions in Medieval Gender Studies*, ed. Ann Marie Rasmussen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019), 151–173.

[59] Van Dyke, "Women and Other Beasts," 95.

[60] BT *Bekhorot* 7b–8a.

[61] Variously transliterated as *dolfinin* and *dulfanin*.

[62] BT *Berakhot* 7b, end of the folio and 8a, top. Note that the language for dolphins' reproduction is chosen to deliberately cite the Genesis 1:28 command to humans to "be fruitful and multiply."

[63] Gen 1:28: "Be fruitful/fertile and multiply/increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth." See Jeremy Cohen, *"Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It": The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989). Nowadays, the *tachash* of Exodus 21:5 and 26:14, which provides its skins for the covering of the ark of the covenant, is commonly translated as "dolphin," but it seems unlikely that medieval commentators understood it in that way.

Aramaic plural ending, offers a gloss: "What are דולפנין? Said Rab Judah: children/sons of the sea (*bnei yama*)."[64]

Later scholars found their curiosity about the *dolfinin/dulfanin* piqued, especially scholars living in an environment where legends about hybrid aquatic creatures abounded – legends such as the Noeck (Wassermann) and Nixie (male and female water sprites). The influence of the traditions concerning mythical *mixta* can perhaps be sensed in a gloss by the founding Ashkenazi authority Rabbeinu Gershom ben Judah (c. 960–1028), who in turn glosses Rab Judah's gloss: "Said Rab Judah: children/sons of the sea. A man/human of the sea."[65] Here the sea-human still appears to be male.[66] But soon afterward, the sea-human became a merwoman. There appears to have been in circulation a version of the Talmud that emended the crucial passage "are fruitful and multiply like ['k-'] human beings" to "are fruitful and multiply with/from ['m-'] human beings." This textual version underlies an emendation by Rashi (c. 1040–1104, i.e., nearly a century after Rabbeinu Gershom), as Rashi tried to make sense of the chain of tradition. Rashi emends the Talmudic (*Berakhot* 8a) wording "are fruitful and multiply like humans" to "are fruitful and multiply from humans":

> This is the correct version: The *dulfanin* are fruitful and multiply from humans – if a person comes to [one of] them, they can fall pregnant from him.

Here is where the antique – medieval bestiary's siren comes into its own. It became possible to turn the "sons of the sea" into a siren, which displaced the dolphin entirely. From Rashi's phrasing, the watery creature is implicitly understood as female and the human as male – analogously to unions between men and she-demons. Rashi's words are gendered, as if mindful of the fairy tales about Nixie, sweet-water mermaids who seduced humans and ultimately caused their deaths (like Melusine in the French tradition and Rusalka in the Slavic tradition). Rashi then proceeds to gloss Rab Judah's gloss on BT *Bekhorot* 8a ("Said Rab Judah: children/sons of the sea"):

> "Sons of the sea" – there are fish in the sea that are half in the form of a human and half in the form of a fish. *Sereine* in the vernacular.[67]

Rashi's followers, the Tosafists, endorsed Rashi's emendation:

> The *dulfanin* are fruitful and multiply from people – this is the version given in the "Notebook" [*kuntres*, i.e., Rashi's Talmud commentary], and thus is proven by the Tosefta [chapter 1]: they give birth and grow [offspring] from humans.[68]

With the Tosafists' endorsement and hence canonization of Rashi's emendation, and with Rashi's gloss equating dolphins and sirens, we open the door to the scary underworld of merwomen copulating with humans and producing more *mixta* and monstrous beings. The seemingly homely mother-and-child pair of siren and siren's child thus spoke to the medieval Jewish world of the supernatural, and revealed the hidden fears and desires attached to speculations about the unions between men and she-demons.[69]

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[64] BT *Bekhorot* 8a.

[65] Rabbeinu Gershom on BT *Bekhorot* 8a: אמר רב יהודה בני ימא. אדם של ים: https://www.sefaria.org/Rabbeinu_Gershom_on_Bekhorot.8a?lang=bi&with=About&lang2=en (accessed on 13 July 2023).

[66] Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (1939; New York: Atheneum, 1987), 40, 279, n. 45.

[67] Rashi on *Bekhorot* 8a. Arsène Darmesteter and D. S. Blondheim, *Les gloses françaises dans les commentaires talmudiques de Raschi* (Paris: Champion, 1929), 130, no. 945 (*Sereine*). The authors record variant spellings in the following manuscripts: שיריינא, Turin, Biblioteca Reale di *Torino,* A, V, 29, destroyed in the fire of 1904, vellum, small octavo, 218 folios, German script, fourteenth century (according to Darmesteter's notes taken before the fire), contains Rashi's commentary on BT *Menachot* (fols 2–107r), *Bekhorot* (107r–165v), *Keritot* (165v–194r), and *Me'ilah* (194r–217v), numerous marginal notes beginning with "Our French rabbis the Tosafists have written," owner: T. Valperga Caluso; שרינא, Turin, Biblioteca Reale di *Torino*, A, VI, 47, destroyed in the fire of 1904, paper, small octavo, 125 folios, German script, dated 1509, contains Rashi's commentary on BT *Bekhorot* (2r–56r), *Temurah* (56v–86r), five blank folios, *Menachot* chapter 4 (92r–104r); 104–1077 blank; Pseudo-Rashi on *Kinim* (108r–117r); 118–120 blank; beginning of Rashi on *Menachot* chapter 3 (121r–122v), 123–124 blank; beginning of a Job commentary by an unknown author (125r–v), owners (fol. 1v): Hayyim Treves and T. Valperga Caluso, relatively good text. The scribe did not understand the glosses [lists of] *Rajeunissements*, Italianisms, and Provençalisms; שירינא, extracts from Rashi on BT *Berakhot* in Jacob ben Solomon ibn Ḥabib, *Ein Ya'akov* (Salonika 1516); שריינא, Talmud printed by Daniel Bomberg (Venice, 1520); סירינא, second edition of the Talmud printed by Daniel Bomberg (Venice, 1529). My thanks go out to Dr. Sandra Hajek for pointing me to Blondheim's work (e-mail communications on December 22 and December 23, 2022).

[68] https://www.sefaria.org/Tosafot_on_Bekhorot.8a.1.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en (accessed on 13 July 2023).

[69] David Rotman, "Sexuality and Communal Space in Stories about the Marriage of Men and She-Demons," in *Monsters and Monstrosity in Jewish History: From the Middle Ages to Modernity*, ed. Iris Idelson-Shein and Christian Wiese (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 187–200; David Rotman, "Textual Animals Turned into Narrative

The possibility of a union between sirens and men, so eminently thinkable for Rashi and the Tosafists, is vigorously disputed by the image of the Pawlikowski Pentateuch. Here, violent resistance is chosen instead: the sailors' phallic weapons can of course also be read between the lines and against the grain. The Christianized bestiary tradition, too, recommended militant measures, employing the military metaphors of *Psychomachia*, Prudentius's famous early-fifth-century epic about the battle waged by the soul [the mariner encountering the siren becomes the *miles Christi* (soldier of Christ), who has to resist the temptations of the world].[70] The Pawlikowski Pentateuch's siren presents a rare reversal of the usual tale of seduction, enchantment, and shipwreck. In this Hebrew Pentateuch, the ship's crew launch a counterattack against the siren. Yet by attacking the siren, the ship seems to get distracted from the other theater of war that looms on the extreme right of the picture: the fortified city ready to defend itself.

Searching for any remotely comparable iconographic parallels showing a violent struggle between mariner and siren, I was alerted by Kay's research to Richard de Fournival's *Bestiaire d'amour*, which I mentioned above.[71] In an illuminated copy of the late thirteenth century, a series of siren images includes two rather violent little pictures, one in which two sirens hit a drowsy-looking mariner over the head with an oar and another in which a mariner counterattacks and transfixes a middle-aged bearded (!) siren with a spear.[72] What is useful is that the gender dynamics are here framed in an antagonistic framework. The connection between Richard de Fournival's French manuscripts and that of a Hebrew Pentateuch seems at first sight very tenuous, but the *Bestiaire d'amour* was also translated into German in the thirteenth century as part of a broader transfer of French culture into German lands. A fine (albeit damaged) illustrated manuscript of the German text includes a beautiful harp-playing siren enchanting a ship, so we know that this lore moved between languages.[73]

The Rothschild Pentateuch's siren-child, too, is engaged in a potentially violent conflict. This conflict pits it against an energetic hunting hound, and the young siren may get savaged. It is doubtful whether its mirror-shield will be enough to protect it from the teeth of the beast.

Conclusion: (*En*)*chanting Pages*

If the splendid liturgical Pentateuchs such as the Rothschild and the Pawlikowski Pentateuchs were not used for the public recitation of the Torah portion, what was their purpose?[74] And even if they sometimes were used for public recitations, especially of Haftarot and Megillot, what social purpose may they have served? My proposition is that these illuminated Pentateuchs functioned as performances that re-enforced gender roles in the local Jewish community, especially masculine gender roles. And they did so in three ways. First, the pronunciation and cantillation marks enabled these texts to be used a part of the liturgy, the communal performance of which was coded as masculine. Second, the Targum Onkelos, the Masorah, and (in the Rothschild Pentateuch) Rashi's commentary invoked the performance of learning in accordance with rabbinic ideals of Jewish masculinity.[75] And third, the illumination constituted a symbolic performance of

Fantasies: The Imaginative Middle Ages," *Interfaces: A Journal of Medieval European Literatures* 5 (2018): 65–77; Shyovitz, "Unearthing"; Shyovitz, *A Remembrance*; Shyovitz, "Beauty and the Bestiary."

70 "Alliciunt pene nautas cantando Sirenae: suasus hostiles dulces Christi Juge miles." This passage is from the *Dicta Chrysostomi*, cited in Pakis, "Contextual Duplicity and Textual Variation," 164–165.

71 Kay, "Siren Enchantments," 177.

72 Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 12469, fol. 6v, digitized on https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b525132672 (accessed on 13 July 2023).

73 Henkel, *Studien*, 133–134. See John Holmberg, *Eine mittelniederfränkische Übertragung des Bestiaire d'Amour, sprachlich untersucht und mit altfranzösischem Paralleltext* (Uppsala: A. B. Lundequistska bokhandeln, 1925). There is an illuminated late-thirteenth-century manuscript in Hannover, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, IV 369, and its digital surrogate is on http://digitale-sammlungen.gwlb.de/sammlungen/sammlungsliste/werksansicht?tx_dlf%5Bdouble%5D=0&tx_dlf%5Bid%5D=17364&tx_dlf%5Bpage%5D=143&cHash=298d119f64def619faf9a371fb69e67d: the siren is on page 158 (the manuscript is paginated). These vernacular bestiary connections need more research.

74 This question is posed by Stern, *Jewish Bible*, 107–108, following Israel M. Ta-Shma, *Early Franco-German Ritual* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), 171–181 [Hebrew], on French rabbis initially permitting the use of *humashim* in liturgical performance, but gradually banning it. Apparently by 1300 – that is, the precise time when the Rothschild and Pawlikowski Pentateuchs were completed – the practice was outlawed. I am grateful to Isaac Lifshitz for sharing his unpublished research on the topic with me.

75 Kirsten Anne Fudeman, "'They Have Ears, but Do Not Hear': Gendered Access to Hebrew and the Medieval Hebrew–French Wedding Song," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96, no. 4 (2006): 542–567.

social status through book patronage, so that Jewish masculinity was aligned with social status.

In "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," Jeffrey Cohen drew attention to the way that "the difficult project of constructing and maintaining gender identities elicits an array of anxious responses throughout culture, producing another impetus to teratogenesis. The woman who oversteps the boundaries of her gender role risks becoming a Scylla, Weird Sister, Lilith." To this list of humanoid monsters, we may add the siren.[76] For the siren is not a woman, but a *mixtum* – that is, a monster that, with its mysteriously asexual lower body, calls into question the very gender boundaries that its upper body seems to epitomize (the nudity, the fecundity, the beauty – all marked as strictly, even excessively, feminine). Breastfeeding is a marker of fecundity, a term championed by Caviness to name the procreative connotations of a number of "erotic" creatures and vaginal/phallic "grotesque" objects in the margins of Gothic manuscripts.[77] The fecundity emphasized by the act of breastfeeding contrasts with the fishy, asexual lower body, leaving one's perception in limbo: how does the siren procreate, and what pleasures might be in store for human men? The phallic weapons of the mariners and the soldiers are also coded sexual images for a kind of erotic desire (of the mariners for the siren and perhaps of the soldiers on the city walls for the mariners). In the context of the synagogue's homomusical community, Caviness's words come to mind: "Such alluring beauty finds companionship with the sirens that assemble in men's books to tempt and repel them. Thus configured as objects of illicit desire, they become a proscription against sodomy."[78] Cohen proposed that "fear of the monster is really a kind of desire," for "the same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint."[79] So the "covenantal bromance" between David and Jonathan is framed, even hedged in, by a complex pictorial composition. It is not a composition that reveals a straightforward iconographic text – image correspondence, but it does provide an imaginative commentary every time the holiday Rosh Chodesh, which ironically was a women's holiday, immediately followed Shabbat. The Rothschild siren, which could be viewed as a merchild, likewise invites contradictory interpretations: the mirror iconography points to conventional images of feminine beauty (siren, Venus, *luxuria*), while the short-cropped hair and the pink fish-skin tunic erase any signs of femininity. Meanwhile, its human body parts do not exclude an allusion to the cross-species fecundity (between sirens and men) that was read by Rashi and the Tosafists into the above-mentioned Talmudic Baraita.

Bestiary lore was no less gendered than the societies that brought it forth. The Rothschild and Pawlikowski Pentateuchs were men's books that were written and illuminated for men's performance of sacred texts in a homomusical community in which the frisson of the feminine monstrous only heightened the performance of masculinity.

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[76] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3–25, here 9.

[77] Caviness, "Patron or Matron?".

[78] Caviness, *Reframing Medieval Art*, chapter 4.

[79] Cohen, "Monster Culture," 16–17.

Appendix A: Lines 1053–1112 from Giullaume le Clerc's Le Bestiaire

De la serein evos dirrom,
Qui mult a estrange facon:
Car de ka ceinture en amont
Est la plus bele ren del mont
A guise de femme formee.
L'altre partie est figure
Come peisson ou com oisel.
Tant chante dolcement et bel
Que cil qui vont per mer nagant
Si tost com il oënt cel chant,
Ne se poënt mie tenir,
Que la nes coveage venir.
Tant lor semble le chant suef,
Que il s'endorment en lor nef,
E quant trestuit sont endormiz,
Donc sont decëuz e traïz:
Car les sereines les occident,
Que il ne braient ne ne crient.
La sereine, qui si ben chante,
Que par son chant les genz enchante,
Done essample a cels chastier
Qui per cest mont deivent nager.
Nos qui par cest monde passom,
Somes decëuz par tel son,
Par la gloire, per le delit
De cest monde, qui nos occit,
Quant le delit avom amors:
La luxure, l'aise del cors,
Et la glotonie e l'ivresce,
L'aise del lit e la richesce,
Les palefreiz, les chevals gras,
La noblesce de riches dras.
Toz jors nos treom cele part,
De l'avenir nos est mult tart.
Iloeques tant nos delitom,
Que a force nos endormom.
Idonc nos occit la sereine:
C'est li malfez, qui nos mal meine,
Qui tant nos fet plonger es vices,
Qu'il nos enclot dedenz se slices.
Donc nos assalt, donc nos cort sore,
Donc nos occit, donc nos acore
Also com les sereines font
Les mariners, qui par mer vont.
Mes il I a meint mariner,
Qui s'en set garder e gaiter.
Quant il vet siglant par la mer,
Ses oreilles soelt estoper,
Qu'il n'oie le chant, quil deceit.
Tot ensement faire le deit
Li hom, qui passe par cest monde:
Chaste se deit tenir e monde
E ses oreilles estoper,
Qu'il n'oie dire ne parler
Chose, qui en pecche le meint,
E issi se defendent meint:
Lor oreilles e lor elz gardent,
Que il n'oient ne qu'il esgardent
Les deliz ne les vanitez,
Par quei plusors sont enchantez.

Appendix B: Hebrew Manuscripts

Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 116 (*object number 2018.43*), https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/109NVP (accessed on 13 July 2023), Frankfurt am Main, pre-1950, Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek (Cod. Ausst. 5), 403 folios, 27.5 × 21 cm.

Contents: Pentateuch arranged liturgically, with Targum Onkelos and Rashi, in three parallel columns. *Masorah parva and magna*. Scribes: Elijah ben Meshullam (consonantal text) and Elijah ben Jehiel (Masorah). Patron: Joseph ben Joseph Martel (Marfeil). Date (completion of writing): Monday, 15 Tammuz 5056 = June 17, 1296.

Library of the National Ossoliński Institute of Poland, Wrocław, Ms. Pawl. 141, thin parchment, 480 folios/960 pages, (the ms is paginated as well as foliated), 244–246 × 200–205 mm.

Contents: fols. 1v–314: Pentateuch (Torah) with Targum Onkelos and Masorah: Genesis (2), Exodus (157), Leviticus (287), Numbers (379), Deuteronomy (509), blank pages (628–632/fols. 315–316); fols. 317–397; Haftarot for Holidays and special Shabbatot (fols. 399–480/pages 633–794); blank pages (795–797); Hagiographa: Job (798), Proverbs (849), Song of Songs (893), Ruth (897), Lamentations (909), Ecclesiastes (919), Esther (936); blank (957–960); undated colophon naming "Jacob." For a detailed description of the codicology, see https://cja.huji.ac.il/browser.php?mode=alone&id=2469 (accessed on 13 July 2023).

Appendix C: A Chronological Selection of French-Language Illustrated Bestiaries with (En)chanting Sirens

Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Ms. Typ 101 (Hugh of Fouilloy, –1172 or 1173. De bestiis et aliis rebus: seu Columba deaurata: manuscript, [French?, c. 1230–1250].) fol. 9v. (seq. 24): three men are in a rowing boat, not to mention the siren in the water beneath the boat, https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:26563635?n=24 (accessed on 13 July 2023).

British Library, Egerton 613, *Bestiaire* of Guillaume le Clerc, Southern England, mid-thirteenth century, fol. 38r: a siren is playing a harp while three boatmen row toward her, sketchy pen drawing of an archaic style harking back to the first half or middle of the thirteenth century; see the unicorn hunt on fol. 40v and the human figures throughout, https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Egerton_MS_613.

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 1444 (France, thirteenth century) (*Bestiaire* of Guillaume le Clerc / *Bestiaire d'amour*) folio 245v and fol. 259v: two similar images in the two texts of sirens wrecking a ship, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc44994g (accessed on 13 July 2023).

Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Ms-3516, fols.198v–212v: *Bestiaire* de Pierre de Beauvais, long version, incipit: "Jacob quant il beneesqui Judam son fil, il dist: Judas mes fils est chaeus del lion"), France, thirteenth century, fol. 202v: three sirens are making music. The text explains that they wreck ships, https://portail.biblissima.fr/ark:/43093/mdataa3120e57123ffbae9b4dc2bede78b48c97c9c923 (accessed on 13 July 2023).

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 14969, England, c. 1260–1270, *Bestiaire* of Guillaume le Clerc, fol. 21r: a siren is wielding two fish rears up in front of a ship and a boat whose boatman is already asleep, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc455131 (accessed on 13 July 2023).

Walters Art Museum Ms. PC.1, France, late thirteenth century, Master of the Livre de Madame Marie, long version (71 chapters), of the *Bestiaire* of Pierre de Beauvais, 72 miniatures, fol. 14v: there are three dressed sirens with hairnets, two of them playing instruments, the third one dragging a sleeping man overboard, https://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/OtherCollections/html/PC1/ (accessed on 13 July 2023).

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 412 Northern France, c. 1285, fol. 230v (*Bestiaire d'amour*): three sirens, one being fully dressed and male, attack a boat with one sleeping boatman; fol. 240r: a fully dressed siren of ambiguous sex plays music to two sleeping men under a tree, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc50522d (accessed on 13 July 2023).

British Library, Sloane 278 (*Aviarium* / *Dicta Chrysostomi*), Northern France / Southern Netherlands, 1280–1300, folio 47r: a siren drags one of three sleeping sailors into the water on the left while an onocentaur draws a bow on the right.

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 1951 (*Bestiaire d'amour ime*), French late thirteenth century, fol. 8v: three avian-piscian sirens with musical instruments and a mirror sink a ship, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc48487p (accessed on 13 July 2023).

Bodleian Library, Douce 308 (*Bestiaire d'amour*), Metz, France, 1309–1325, fol. 91v: two nude sirens pull a drowsy cowled boatman overboard, https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/dd9d1160-196b-48a3-9427-78c209689c1f/surfaces/affc08a3-4f67-46bf-8635-cd1bbc88e46b (accessed on 13 July 2023).