

Medieval Histories

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Seder. From the Lombard Haggadah, fol. 4v © Les Enluminures

The Lombard Haggadah from the 14th Century

The Lombard Haggadah has been preserved in a private collection for more than hundred years. Recently put up for sale, this upcoming week offers a unique possibility for New Yorkers to enjoy the Gothic manuscript.



The Lombard Haggadah, The Man dressed in courtly attire of the 14th century is harvesting a large bunch of maror (bitter herbs). Fol 25 v. © Les Enluminures

One of the magnificent Jewish manuscripts is the Lombard Haggadah. Produced in Milan in the 14th century it tells the story of the flight of the Israelites and sets the order of the Seder. Telling the story of the flight of the Jews from Egypt based on the biblical book of Exodus, the Haggadah was – and still is – used during the Seder, the ritual meal of the first night of Passover.

This particular manuscript has been hidden from view for more than a hundred years. It was last shown to the public in Paris in 1900. Now, it will be unveiled at the New York Gallery of Les Enluminures on the 12th of April and will remain on view until the 20th. During this period, there will be organized a public lecture as well as a conference, both co-sponsored by Fordham University. Part of the conference will focus on a **new scholarly publication** exploring this particular Haggadah. One of only three illustrated manuscript Haggadot remaining in private hands, it is also for sale – for an “undisclosed mid to upper seven-figure sum”.

The manuscript holds 75 pale and delicate drawings telling the stories about the preparation of the meal, prayers, blessings, the hand-washing, the readings, the scenes at the table and the meal itself.

Likely, the manuscript was made for one of the rich Jewish citizens, whom Duke Gian Galeazzo Visconti welcomed to Lombardy in the last decades of the 14th century. The illuminations in the manuscript are

characteristic of the international Gothic style and similar in tone and execution to that of Christian liturgical books from the same period.



Detail from the Lombard Haggadah of the entry for December in the calendar, showing “the slaughtering of the pig”. © Les Enluminures

In the same way that scenes from the life of Christ show costumes and interiors of the day and the landscapes of the region, we see stories from Genesis and Exodus clothed in similar way. Although Jews were forbidden to own land, the manuscript also peculiarly, if not uniquely, depicts the Labours of the Month. Even more curious, the page for December depicts the slaughtering of the pig!

Likely, this is a reflection of the Milanese workshop, in which the manuscript was executed. The scholar, Milvia Bollati, has suggested the workshop of the master builder, sculptor and illuminator Giovannino de Grassi (c. 1350–98); or perhaps an artist in his circle, possibly the Master of the Paris Tacuinum. Although the Lombard Haggadah reveals diverse influences, the most pervasive are those from the Paris version of the Tacuinum Sanitatis, ascribed to a member of Giovannino de Grassi’s workshop and completed for a member of the Visconti court in Milan, patron of this group of artists.

The preservation of this unique manuscript gives reason to pause. Persecuted for more than a millennium, the peripatetic Jews were constantly moving throughout Europe in search of a “new” safe place to live. To some extent, the Italian city-states offered refuge and exhibited a degree of tolerance. Nevertheless, their living conditions were always fragile. Thus, the survival of the Lombard Haggadah witness to the extraordinary resilience of some of these Jewish families and communities.

<https://www.medieval.eu/the-lombard-haggadah/>

SOURCE:

The Lombard Haggadah. Workshop of Giovannino de Grassi Milan, c. 1390-1400 (Press release)

VIEW:

The Lombard Haggadah

Les Enluminures, New York