

Title: Mapping Migration: The Barcelona Haggadah (BL MS Add 14761) As A Material Witness to Sephardi Migration 1391-1459

Abstract:

Studies on mobility in the medieval period typically centre on trade, looting, or diplomacy. This paper provides an alternative paradigm. It traces the emigration of Jews from Spain to Italy in the mid-fifteenth century through the migration of Sephardic Hebrew manuscripts, examining them as material witnesses that preserve and accumulate tradition amidst displacement.

The paper focuses on a case study of the Barcelona Haggadah, an ornate Passover prayerbook made in 1360s Catalonia. The Haggadah migrated to Bologna, in or before 1459, where it was owned by a man named Moses ben Abraham. The Haggadah's movement mirrors the emigration of Jews to Italy following anti-Jewish attacks in Catalonia in 1391. Previous studies prioritise the insight the Haggadah provides into Jewish ritual in 1360s Catalonia and, thus, have not resituated it within mid-fifteenth-century Bologna.

This paper foregrounds the Haggadah's migration and new life in Italy. It employs codicological and art historical analyses to examine how the Haggadah changed physically over time and how it would have been used and its images interpreted by Moses. It considers the cross-cultural and socio-political dynamics surrounding Jews in mid-fifteenth-century Bologna, paying attention to the second-hand book trade and interest among wealthy Italian Jews to purchase Sephardic manuscripts. In doing so, it provides new insight into Jewish life in mid-fifteenth-century Bologna and how emigration impacted Sephardic tradition. Additionally, it opens new dialogues about the importance of studying the full lives of Hebrew manuscripts, highlighting the ways they act as carriers of Jewish tradition long after they are made.