The Monk’s Haggadah is at once a beautiful facsimile edition of a remarkable Haggadah manuscript and also a collaborative edition, translation, and analysis of text, image, and material object. In addition to its Hebrew Haggadah text and elaborate illuminations, the manuscript (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod. Hebr. 200) also contains Latin marginal comments and a lengthy Latin prologue, which the authors describe as an early example of the sort of Christian ethnography of Jewish life that was to prove so popular in the early modern period. Although the prologue is impressively accurate in its explanation of the Haggadah and fifteenth-century Ashkenazi Passover observance, it also includes supposed rituals for incorporating Christian blood into both matzah and wine for the seder. This is the first full-length study of the manuscript, and David Stern’s introduction describes the collaboration that brought the volume into being. It makes for a great story, and Stern tells it as the intellectual adventure it clearly was. Fourteen years in the making, The Monk’s Haggadah represents quite an achievement and demonstrates the power of multidisciplinary collaborative work.

Each of the three authors—Stern, Christoph Markschies, and Sarit Shalev-Eyni—plays a critical role in the project, and Stern’s introduction integrates their various perspectives into a coherent narrative. It would seem wrong to provide too much detail about the introduction, as it is written to bring the reader along on a journey of discovery and it would be a shame to spoil that. Briefly, sometime before 1475, the Haggadah was commissioned by a Jewish patron in eastern Bavaria or Austria. A Jewish scribe completed the Hebrew text and began the work of vocalizing it, but for some reason left off the project, and it eventually fell to two other scribes to complete that work. During that same later phase, one or more artists took up the task of illustrating and illuminating the codex. Sometime between 1475 and 1493 the manuscript came into the possession of a Christian canon named Paul Wann, who bequeathed it to the Benedictine monastery at Tegernsee. The librarian sent the manuscript to a...
Dominican Hebraist, Erhard von Pappenheim (d. 1497), asking for an explanation of the text. Erhard responded with a very long letter—a treatise, really—describing the Haggadah and the ritual seder in which it was meant to be used. The librarian had the treatise copied and bound with the Haggadah as a prologue. Stern and Markschies originally conceived of their project as a facsimile edition of the Haggadah with the Latin prologue as the primary point of interest. At the urging of an editor, they brought in an art historian (Shalev-Eyni) to examine the codex and its illuminations, and that changed everything. As it turns out, the construction of the Haggadah itself is as interesting a story as the prologue that accompanies it.

At first glance, the Haggadah appears to be a fairly typical late fifteenth-century Ashkenazi Haggadah. The words chosen for special illumination, the placement of images in the margin of the text, the specific scenes depicted, and the manner of depicting them are, for the most part, consistent with other Haggadot from this time and place. But Shalev-Eyni's examination of the codex turned up surprising results, detailed in chapter 2. In addition to her discoveries concerning the manuscript's production mentioned above, she also finds surprises in the illuminations. There are certain deviations from typical Italo-Ashkenazi Haggadot that suggest either a lack of understanding of the ritual depicted (as in the illustrations for havdalah [the ritual separating the Sabbath from the rest of the week] and maror, “bitter herbs”) or an intentional Christianization of the images (the illustration of God's outstretched arm not just with a disembodied hand holding a sword, but with a fully embodied Christ-like figure holding a sword in one hand while three fingers of the other point toward the text in the style of Christian benediction, for example).

We do not know whether the unusual images were created when the drawings were first made or later when the artist(s) colored them. But Shalev-Eyni demonstrates that at least some of the vocalization was done after the illuminations were in place, so either way, Jewish experts worked with and around odd Christian imagery. Were these experts converts to Christianity? And what of the patron? Was he a Jew who simply did not notice an accidental Christianization of standard Haggadah scenes by a Christian artist? Or was the work done intentionally in a Christian manner for a Christian patron who came into possession of the unfinished book? Shalev-Eyni cautiously (and responsibly) sets out more questions than answers on these points, but Stern takes her observations and leans toward the idea of a codex intentionally finished for a Christian audience. “The Monk's Haggadah,” in this scenario, refers not only to the eventual ownership of the Haggadah by the monks of Tegernsee, but also to the completion of the Haggadah explicitly for a monastic audience.

Christoph Markschies picks up in chapter 3 with the history of the manuscript from the point at which it came into Paul Wann's hands. Paul began his career as a canon in Passau in 1477, just one year before the infamous host-desecration accusation and burning/expulsion/conversion of accused Jews there. We do not know how Paul came to possess the Haggadah, although it may have come to him in the chaos that ensued after the host desecration accusation. Paul donated the manuscript with numerous other books and liturgical objects to the Benedictines at Tegernsee upon his death in 1489. The monastery's reputation alone would have provided sufficient reason for the donation, but we also learn that the librarian, Ambrosius Schwerzenbeck, was Paul's confessor and that Paul had studied in Vienna with the abbot, Konrad von Ayrinschmalz. Markschies describes the monks' appeal to Erhard for help and his return of the Haggadah with Latin marginal comments and a lengthy explanation of the text and its context. Erhard is a fascinating figure in his own right. He attended the blood libel trial in Trent (1475) and wrote a German translation of
the Latin proceedings. He refers to the Trent confessions in his text, explaining that while the Haggadah itself is silent on the matter, his knowledge of the blood rituals came straight from the mouths of Jews in their confessions. The last section of this chapter provides an overview of the prologue’s contents. The notion that Jews use Christian blood at the seder, both in the production of matzah for the seder and incorporated into the wine at the seder table, is presented in a matter-of-fact way. Given this, and the deep anti-Jewish sentiment that underlies that discussion, Marksches finds it remarkable that Erhard concludes his text by drawing a list of parallels between Jewish Passover ritual and Christian Eucharistic celebration.

In chapter 4, David Stern examines Erhard’s work in the context of early modern Christian Hebraism, concluding that he was quite skilled—able to read the Haggadah on his own and familiar with a range of other Haggadot, rabbinic material, and vernacular Jewish texts. We get a thorough comparison of Erhard’s prologue with contemporary Ashkenazi sources, and Stern leaves us impressed with Erhard’s knowledge. Stern believes Erhard’s knowledge of Jewish ritual came entirely from written sources and the Trent confessions (there are no references to Jewish informants other than the Trent prisoners), and argues that within the early modern tradition of Christian Hebraism, Erhard is sui generis. He presents Erhard as an ethnographer interested exclusively in Jewish ritual practice, specifically the seder, and entirely uninterested in the usual subject matter of late medieval and early modern Christian Hebraists: Hebrew Bible and rabbinic interpretation, including Kabbalah.

This last point seems to be something of an overstatement. Erhard begins the treatise with a contrast of the (Christian) letter that gives life and the (Jewish) letter that kills. He goes on to establish an allegorical framework for the description that will follow, invoking I Corinthians to encourage his Christian reader to mentally transform the physical ritual of the Jews into a spiritual, interior experience. It makes sense that, at a time when scholastic theologians were increasingly interested in theories of ritual efficacy, Christian interest in “what Jews say” would give way to interest in “what Jews do,” and Stern convincingly argues that Erhard is a harbinger of that trend. But Erhard wrote the prologue specifically to tell the abbot of Tegernsee something about his manuscript and its context: the ethnographic parameters of the prologue make sense for the genre. Why should we think that this marks the limits of Erhard’s interests as a Hebraist? Given that Erhard once composed a short piece on the Hebrew Tetragrammaton and was close enough to Johannes Reuchlin to warrant a dedication from him, it would seem his interests as a Hebraist extended beyond ethnography.

The remainder of the book is devoted to a full codicological description, a diplomatic rendering and translation of the prologue (based on Erhard’s original letter in Clm 18526b, which contains the Hebrew absent in the Haggadah copy of the prologue), an English translation of the Haggadah text, and a facsimile of the entire manuscript. The editions and translations are well done and add significantly to the value of the volume. The facsimile itself is gorgeous. It should be pointed out that the manuscript is now digitized and available online through the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. Some of the visual evidence Shalev-Eyni asks us to consider is simply not visible in the facsimile, while it is perfectly clear in the digitized version. When I wanted to examine an image in any kind of detail, I turned to the digitized version, but I still appreciated the ability to thumb through the Haggadah in something resembling its original form, and to move effortlessly between text, object, and analysis. The digitized manuscript and the print facsimile serve two different functions, and we are fortunate to have them both. The Monk’s Haggadah has much to tell us about the history of Christian-Jewish encounter in late me-
dieval and early modern Europe, and also about the importance of material objects in such study and the value of multidisciplinary collaboration.

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