

The Medieval Haggadah: Art, Narrative & Religious Imagination

by Marc Michael Epstein.

Yale University Press, 2011.

Several of the great illuminated medieval Haggadot are now in print in facsimile, the best with scholarly commentary and analysis on both the text and the illuminations. My own interest in these documents is focussed on the animals that appear as well as the grotesques and drolleries that are a staple of manuscripts from the period, both Jewish and Christian.

The Medieval Haggadah, written by the professor of religion at Vassar College, is a beautifully printed and illustrated piece of fine scholarship that offers insights and theories into all aspects of the medieval haggadot under consideration.

Marc Michael Epstein focusses on four great haggadot, The Birds' Head, The Golden, The Rylands and The Brother. The book is divided into three sections, the last two haggadot being taken as a pair. Epstein considers their provenance and authorship, the environment in which they were created and by whom they were commissioned; he critically summarises the existing scholarship on these texts offering a perspective that often clarifies and he comments on the plates of the haggadot and what appears on them.

The Medieval Haggadah is a delight, and will be of especial interest to the many Jews who collect haggadot and books about them; it also provides a fascinating insight into the lives of those who created them and the settings in which they were first used.

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