The analysis of any artefact, including that of visual representations joined to, or inserted in a text, has to consider that all visual documents comprise two components:

1) The first component is the ‘message’, or content, visualized either by means of (a) an abstract symbol, or by (b) a narrative symbol, by which is meant a narrative scene charged with many-levelled exegetical (theological, allegorical, mystical) interpretations which raise the represented episode above the level of a simple, accurate depiction of the literary account. Examples of such ‘narrative symbols’ in the Jewish tradition are the Aqedah, Jacob’s dream, Moses’ receiving of the Law, among many others.

2) The second component is the formal element, namely style and technique. Whereas the ‘message’ creates a diachronic relation between the representations of the same symbol (or narrative symbol) belonging to different periods within the same cultural tradition, the formal elements have to be interpreted according to synchronous relations, as reflected by parameters of time and space, which relate artefacts belonging to different traditions within the same period.

Considering more particularly the visual documents joined to, or appearing within the text, two categories can to be distinguished:

1. Non-significant elements, which are usually called ornaments;
2. Significant elements, a category which includes all types of illustrations.

1. Non-significant visual elements
Although it is usually considered that the main role of the ornaments is to enhance the aesthetic value of the book or of the page, from a merely technical point of view, the primary function of all decoration is to organize the book, the literary unit or the page.
The hierarchical graduation of the ornaments will allow the reader to distinguish the first page of a book (fig. 1), the first page of a section, the beginnings of the paragraphs (fig. 2) or of the pericopes. These hierarchically distributed ornaments provide a guide to the reader, who, when looking for a specific passage in the text, with the help of these 'codes' will be saved the trouble of reading the entire text in order to find it.

More specific techniques of ornamentation, the so called 'shaped-script', have been used to establish a hierarchy between different texts, as for example a text and its commentary juxtaposed on the same page (fig. 3), or to distinguish information (e.g. the colophon) copied on the same page as the text, but independent of it.

The non-significant visual elements, through their synchronic relation to other artefacts, can provide important criteria to determine the date and the place of origin of a manuscript. Indeed, to take as an example filigree ornamentation, the style of the filigree will be different in fourteenth-century manuscripts of the Upper Rhine from that appearing in contemporary manuscripts of Aragon; that used in a fifteenth-century manuscript of Castile differs from the filigree ornament found in a fifteenth-century manuscript of Lisbon.

As far as style, or motifs, are concerned, synchronic relations can also be established between artefacts realized in different mediums. A manuscript can be decorated by elements taken over from architectural ornaments. For example, the decoration of the arcaded pages of a Bible executed in Soria at the beginning of the fourteenth century (MS Paris, Bibl. nat. hébr. 21) has been taken over from that of the slightly earlier, local Aljefaria castle. These elements may again provide arguments to determine the place and/or time of origin of the manuscript, based on the place and/or time of the building. Finally, ornaments can also include historical information of a different type, such as armorial emblems or signs referring either to the Jewish owner (fig. 4), or to the political power or state where the owner, the scribe, or the artist lived (fig. 5).

The above examples show that, secondarily, the nonsignificant elements become significant as far as the historical context of the manuscript is concerned. They remain, however, basically nonsignificant in their relation to the text, because of the absence of any intrinsic relation to the text. This absence of relation to the text, and their exclusive relation to the manuscript as art-object, means also that text and ornament can have, and in most cases do have, an independent, non-conflicting history.

2. Significant visual elements
The relation between the text and a significant visual element joined to it, is far more complex. The simplest case is that of scientific
diagrams. Astrological treatises (e.g. Isaac Israeli's *Yesod 'olam*), medical works (the surgery treatise of Abu'l Qasim Al-Zahrawi), were often provided with diagrams by the authors themselves, which were copied with the text for many centuries without modification. These visual elements, depending entirely on the text, were transmitted with the text. They appear also in the different versions (Latin, Hebrew, Arabic) of the treatise: the history of the image and that of the text are interconnected.

The same was often true of exegetical works illustrated by the authors themselves. A well known example is Maimonides' Temple plans. As Rachel Wischnitzer has proved, these appear first in an autograph copy of Maimonides' *Commentary on the Mishnah*, and were later transferred (by the author?) to Book 8 of the *Mishneh Torah* (fig. 6). They appear in all the Ashkenazi copies of the work (fig. 7), at times even with errors, since the copyist no longer understood his model but still tried to copy it faithfully. The same can be said of Rashi's diagrams on the Holy Land appearing in all the copies of his commentary on *Numbers*.

In the case of literary works, two possibilities exist:

(a) The illustrations were planned, or even executed by the author. In this case the work is usually copied with the same illustrations in all the successive copies of the text. An example is the *Mashal ha-qadmoni* of Isaac ben Solomon ibn Sahula, of the twelfth century, who himself added the illustrations to each of the fables. These illustrations are faithfully reproduced in all the copies of the work, manuscripts as well as early prints, with only slight stylistic changes. The 'message', expressed here by the iconography of the visual version of the fables - the diachronic element - remained unchanged. The formal element was 'synchronized' according to the prevailing stylistic trend of the place/time where the copy was executed. But these stylistic changes did not affect the basic character of the illustrations; hence the history of the text and that of the image remained interconnected.

(b) In some cases, the visual elements accompanying a text were designed and added many centuries after the literary work had been written. An interesting example of this phenomenon is provided by Kallir's 'Piyut for Dew' which is reproduced in many thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Ashkenazi *mahzorim*. As is well known, Kallir was active in Palestine, around the sixth century. His piyyut was probably copied many times, during the following centuries, but the illustrations were joined to it only around the middle of the thirteenth century, when the large folio *mahzorim* started to be produced. And these illustrations, namely the signs of the Zodiac and in two of the manuscripts also the labours of the months (fig. 8), were taken over from contemporary Christian Psalter and Breviary illustrations. In this case, although the relation
between the text and the image is straightforward, text-tradition and image-tradition have each its own history.

The discrepancy between the text and the iconography may be not only a matter of chronology: text and image may reflect also different conceptions. Kallir’s *piyyut*, although enumerating the seasons and the months, is intimately linked to the Hebrew alphabet, and may have an exegetical background linked to the theory of the Hebrew letters as the instruments of creation, as do many Hebrew texts of the contemporary late antique period. The iconography of the months and the labours derives from calendar illustrations of the twelfth–thirteenth centuries. When these two ‘messages’ – that of the text and that of the image – were linked, an adjustment became necessary: the twenty-four images (twelve months + twelve labours) had to be reduced to twenty-two: the number of the verses of Kallir’s *piyyut*, corresponding to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Hence the creation of the combined iconography of the signs Aquarius and Capricorn (fig. 9), and of the corresponding labours. But this adjustment is merely formal. The possible mystical interpretation of Kallir’s text was simply overlooked by those who planned the illustrations.

The iconographic programme of the *mahzor* illustrations shows some other conceptual discrepancies. The reason for this may have been that this book, created in the thirteenth century, is composed of texts which were written several centuries earlier and originally were not illustrated, probably because they lack any narrative material that would call for illustration. Yet, the medieval artist who planned the large liturgical book wanted to organize its contents, and so needed an illustration at the head of each section. Different solutions were found. At times the artist has chosen to illustrate a word at the beginning of the section and visualized its literal meaning. A star and a crescent is used to indicate the beginning of the section for the New Moon, or blooming roses to visualize the allegorical invocation of Israel as *Shushan ’emeq* (fig. 10). These ‘word illustrations’, typical of the *mahzor* iconography, belong, as far as their history is concerned, to the history of the book where they appear. But their ‘message’, which at first sight seems to reflect the contents of the text which they illustrate, in fact reduces the meaning of the text to the level of plain, literal interpretation and, by doing so, may run counter to the intentions of the *paytan*.

In some cases the illustration visualizes an allegorical or mystical sense which is not intended by the accompanying text, but which was supposed to be known by the reader. This is the case of the illustration of a *piyyut*, starting with a quotation of *Shir ha-shirim*, in the Leipzig *mahzor*. Although the *piyyut* itself does not develop the mystical sense of *Shir ha-shirim*, which takes the work as a celebration of God’s love for his chosen people, medieval commentaries promoting this interpretation are well known in the
Ashkenazi area where the mahzor was produced, and it is these texts – and not the piyyut itself – which gave rise to the illustration representing the Bride and the Bridegroom. As for the formal elements of the image, they probably derive from an illustration in a contemporary Latin manuscript, based also on a mystical interpretation of Canticles. The two traditions of commentating – the Jewish and the Christian – reflect the same mentality, which is characteristic of thirteenth-century exegesis on both sides of the religious divide. The same conception is reflected by the two illustrations – the one in the Latin manuscript, and the other in the Hebrew mahzor. In other words, the mahzor illustration, although inserted within an earlier text, belongs, by virtue of the concept which lies behind it, to Bible commentary of the thirteenth century, and it was then that the image was created.

(c) Chronological discrepancies exist also in illustrations of biblical episodes. These discrepancies become manifest either through an analysis of the stylistic criteria, or of the exegetical ideas reflected by the images. In fact, except for some fifteenth century Hebrew manuscripts of Italian provenance, very few biblical images were created for Hebrew manuscripts in the Middle Ages. Those which are extant (they appear more often in ritual books than in Bibles), whether from Spain or from Germany, simply perpetuate a much earlier iconography.

An example of out-dated stylistic criteria, attesting the use of earlier, imported models, is provided by the symbolic composition of the so called ‘Temple implements’. This double page composition, prefixed to the text in Sephardi Bibles, was, according to C. Roth, created in late antiquity in the Near East. The earliest witness originating from the European diaspora is a Bible copied in Toledo in 1277. All the stylistic features of this composition clearly point to an oriental model copied faithfully by the Sephardi craftsman: bi-dimensionality, lack of any indication of space or volume, flat background, geometric division of the page, the use of gold as the sole colour, and even the ornamental motifs, recall typical features of oriental book-painting. These stylistic criteria are entirely out of place in the context of the thirteenth-century local painting, which was then in the most flourishing period of the Gothic style. For several decades, the composition was reproduced with the same oriental features. It was only in 1301 that a first attempt was made to update the style: leaving the represented objects unmodified, a chequered background replaced the plain parchment ground. Progressively, the composition was enriched and embellished, but only the non-significant elements (the background and the colour scheme) were ‘modernized’. The objects themselves, i.e. the symbols, were transmitted without any important modifications.

These typical Jewish pictorial symbols provide an instructive
example of the unaltered transmission of the significant element, as well as of the diachronic relation existing between the often remote prototype and the successive copies. By way of contrast, the formal elements (that is to say, the stylistic features), were gradually and progressively adapted to the requirements of local artistic trends prevailing at the time when the copy was executed, thereby creating new, synchronic relations with contemporary works of art, relations which extended beyond the boundaries of Jewish civilization.

(d) Narrative scenes visualizing biblical episodes can be divided into two categories. Illustrations representing biblical events which have been invested with a specific meaning by religious thought, and which were qualified as ‘narrative symbols’ above. Episodes of this kind are: the Aqedah, Noah in the ark, Jacob’s dream, Moses’ receiving of the Law on Mount Sinai, to mention only a few among those most frequently represented.

Whether represented as a ‘monoscene’ (fig. 11), or, in accordance with the cyclic method, as a sequence of two or three successive episodes (fig. 12), the message of the illustration is not reduced to the plain visual transposition of a story. Illustrations evoke simultaneously all the theological, ritual or mystical interpretations by which centuries of religious speculation have enriched the biblical narrative. They are used in ritual manuscripts, in exegetical works, as well as in Bibles. It has been established that the creation of these narrative symbols goes back to the earliest manifestations of biblical art at the beginning of the common era. In some cases relatively late copies follow quite accurately the prototype; in others, however, the mentality of a later milieu has modified quite radically the earlier model. Nonetheless, despite the transformation of the formal elements, the model often remains identifiable. And since the essential part of the image, the ‘significant element’, is, in the main, unaffected by the stylistic variations, the diachronic relation between the prototype and the copy remains unbroken.

(e) The second category of narrative images – the last one to be mentioned here – is that of the biblical cycles. These occur only in one type of medieval Hebrew manuscript, the fourteenth century Sephardi Haggadot. Much has been written about these biblical illustrations in recent years, so we can sum up the main points without going into details.

The biblical cycles of the Haggadot belong to the category of significant visual elements but not to that of narrative symbols. Their stylistic features do not provide any decisive argument which enables us to define their character or their origin. In some manuscripts, produced by talented artists, the style of the images is updated and the synchronic relation with contemporary works of art can be easily established. In other manuscripts, executed by less trained craftsmen, the stylistic features are not expressive and hence irrelevant.
As for the diachronic relation, three arguments suggest that these images derive from models of a much earlier period:

(1) The narrative elements visualized by these cycles do not refer to the text into which they have been inserted. Indeed, the text of the Haggadah does not mention the Creation, the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Jacob, Joseph, and so forth. In other words, these illustrations were not created in order to illustrate the Haggadah. Neither were they invented for insertion into the fourteenth century manuscripts to which they were added.

(2) The method of narration is similar to that found in the earliest preserved biblical cycles (Dura, the Cotton Genesis, the Vienna Genesis, the Octateuchs). The principal characteristic of this method is the careful visualizing of all the details of the biblical account down to the humblest, without distinguishing those episodes which have a specific theological meaning from those which are simply descriptive. All represented events have an equal status. This method of illustrating a text was typical of late antiquity, but is quite alien to the theologically oriented conceptual art of the Middle Ages (figs 13–14).

(3) This method of narrative illustration reflects a specific type of biblical exegesis, namely, that of the *targum*, the *midrash* and the biblical pseudepigrapha. There is much to be said for the hypothesis that this literature, and its pictorial version, were produced in the same milieu, in the same geographical area, and at around the same period of time. What the biblical cycles of the Sephardi Haggadot reflect through their diachronic relation with their prototypes, is a specific exegetical trend, which is the typical product of rabbinical literature of the first centuries of our era in the Near East. By what means, and through what channels, these iconographical prototypes were preserved and transmitted to the fourteenth century Jewish artists of Catalonia, is a problem beyond the subject of this paper.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that a thorough analysis of an image inserted in, or added to a text, can provide important evidence concerning the history of an iconographical unit or group, the history of an illustrated text, the history of an illustrated manuscript, and the cultural history of the group by whom and for whom the illustrated text was produced. As a work of art, the text illustration belongs to the period when the manuscript (and hence the copy) was produced. As an intellectual witness, it often has an independent history from that of the text in which it appears. The manifold relationship, or the absence of relationship, that can exist between the text and the image which illustrates it, brings to light the complexity of the medieval book as an artefact.
PLATES

THE IMAGE IN THE TEXT
Figure 1: Ornamental Frontispiece
(Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS Hebrew 8, fol. 1r)
Figure 2: Decorated Chapter Headings

(Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS Hebrew 6, fol. 23v)
Figure 3: Marginal Commentary Copied in Shaped Script  
(Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, MS A 77/I, fol. 149r)
Figure 4: Medallion with the Coat of Arms of a Jewish (?) Family
(Manuscrits, John Rylands Library, MS Hebrew 8, fol. Iv (detail))
Figure 5: Coat of Arms of Ferrante I, King of Naples
(Nîmes, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 13, fol. 112r)
Figure 6: Maimonides' Plan of the Temple in the Mishneh Torah
(Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, MS A 77III, fol. 4v)

Figure 7: Maimonides' Plan of the Temple in the Mishneh Torah
(New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary, MS 350, fol. 276)
Figure 8: Zodiac Signs Illustrating Kallir’s ‘Piyut for Dew’
(Worms Mahzor; Jerusalem, JNUL, MS 4° Heb. 781/I, fol. 96v)

Figure 9: The Combined Sign of Aquarius and Capricorn
(Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, MS A 46a, fol. 134v)
Figure 10: ‘The Rose of the Valleys’. Illustration of a Piyyut (New York, Public Library, Ashkenazic Mahzor, fol. 146v)

Figure 11: The Binding of Isaac (Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, MS A 77/III, fol. 81r)
Figure 12: The Binding of Isaac.
Figure 13: Moses’ Hand Becoming Leprous (Ex. 4:6)
(Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS Hebrew 6, fol. 14r)

Figure 14: Moses’ Hand Becoming Leprous (Ex. 4:6)
(Salerno ivories (after R. Bergman, The Salerno ivories))