

THE JOHN RYLANDS MEGILLAH AND SOME OTHER ILLUSTRATED MEGILLOTH OF THE XVTH TO XVIITH CENTURIES¹

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THE term *megillah*, the Hebrew for "scroll", is generally applied to scrolls of the Book of Esther (*Megilloth Esther*), which is read annually at the Feast of Purim. The date for this reading is fixed for the 14th Adar.²

The object of this study is to draw attention to a number of little-known illustrated *megilloth*, most of which have received only a brief mention in previous publications, amongst them the Rylands *Megillah*. Secondly, we should like to establish the correct chronological and iconographic sequence of some

¹ I wish to thank Dr. F. Taylor, Keeper of Manuscripts at the John Rylands Library, for his encouragement in the writing of this study, and I also acknowledge his kindness in arranging for the microfilming of the Rylands *Megillah*. Further, I wish to thank Mr. J. Scott, Librarian of University College Library, London, Dr. I. Yoel, Deputy Director of the Jewish National University Library, Jerusalem, Mr. F. Salet, Curator of the Musée de Cluny, and the Librarian and Committee of the Athenaeum, Liverpool, for having kindly sent the microfilms of the manuscripts in their collections dealt with in this study. For the deciphering of the colophon of the Rylands *Megillah* I was able to submit my results to M. le Grand Rabbin A. Deutsch, of Strasbourg, Professor G. Vajda, of Paris, Professor E. Roth, of Mayence, and Mr. M. Catane, Librarian at the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem; I am grateful for their invaluable advice. I have also had the pleasure of discussing the artistic interest of these *Megilloth* with Professor L. Grodecki, of Strasbourg. Finally, my thanks are due to Mr. P. Skrine for his devoted help in turning the manuscript into readable English.

I am indebted to the Rylands Library (Pl. II (a) and (b)), the Jewish National and University Library at Jerusalem (Pl. II (c)), and the Libraries of the Liverpool Athenæum (Pl. III(a) and (b) and Pl. IV) and University College, London (Pl. III(c)) for their kind permission to illustrate this article with reproductions from manuscripts in their collections. The details shown in Pl. I are reproduced from *Die Judaica Sammlung S. Kirschstein Berlin*, Munich, 1932 ((a)), and D. H. Müller and J. von Schlosser, *Die Haggadah von Sarajevo*, Vienna, 1898 ((b) and (c)).

² This date applies to the towns which were not fortified in the period of Joshua; those which were fortified at that time celebrate Purim on the 15th Adar. Maimonides gives details of this custom in his *Mishne Torah*. For a translation see *The Code of Maimonides*, Book III, *The Book of Seasons*, translated from the Hebrew by Salomon Gandz and Hyman Klein (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1961), p. 455. See also Esther ix. 17-19.

of the known manuscripts. In so doing, we shall have to assign various manuscripts to dates other than those to which they have been attributed hitherto, thus correcting certain errors which seem to have arisen on the subject.

The events of the Book of Esther are to a certain extent represented in medieval Christian art, particularly in illuminated manuscripts, in some rare cases in stained glass windows, and occasionally in sculpture and frescoes, such as the fresco in St. Clement's at Rome, dating from the ninth century. Amongst the medieval sculptures on the subject mention may be made of the four scenes from the story of Esther depicted in the arch-vaulting of the porch of the north transept of Chartres Cathedral¹ dating from the early thirteenth century. Thirdly, a very important and full iconographic version of the Book of Esther is to be found in one of the stained glass windows, dating from about the middle of the thirteenth century, in the Sainte-Chapelle at Paris; here 129 different small scenes taken from the story of Esther² are shown, making it undoubtedly one of the most important medieval depictions of the Book of Esther.

Among illuminated Christian manuscripts the choice of subjects is rather limited. In the first place we have the "Bibles moralisées",³ also dating from about the middle of the thirteenth century, which contain an abundance of scenes. But whether we look before the thirteenth century or after it, until the fifteenth we find that the Book of Esther generally provided a very limited number of subjects for illustration and usually just one, such as Esther and Ahasuerus or the two other principal figures, Mordecai and Haman. Nevertheless various Bibles do contain a far larger number of illustrations. For instance the Arsenal Bible,⁴ which dates from 1250-4, in its frontispiece to the Book of Esther depicts five scenes,⁵ one of which represents Mordecai

¹ See Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral: Christ—Mary—Ecclesia* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), p. 71.

² See *Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi*, vol. 1. *Les vitraux de Notre-Dame et de la Sainte-Chapelle de Paris*, by Marcel Aubert, Louis Grodecki, Jean Lafond, Jean Verrier (Paris, 1959), pp. 258-73 and Pls. 71-76.

³ See A. de Laborde, *La Bible moralisée illustrée*, Paris, 1911-27.

⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, MS. 5211, fol. 261^r.

⁵ There is a reproduction of this frontispiece in Hugo Buchthal, *Miniature Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Oxford, 1957), Pl. 74a.

sitting on the royal horse and being led out by Haman. Another medieval manuscript, a Bible of 1447 at Heidelberg,¹ contains six illustrations. Finally, there is one which contains as many as thirteen scenes; this is an "Historienbibel" of 1460, formerly in the Prussian State Library at Berlin.²

It goes without saying that the iconographic themes of the Book of Esther did not disappear at the end of the Middle Ages. The Italian Renaissance also made use of them, for instance in a pair of "cassone" attributed to Botticelli or his School, one of the four scenes depicted on these showing Mordecai.³ Even later, well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Esther is still used as a subject for paintings.

When we turn to representations of the Book of Esther in medieval Jewish art, we find that they are almost all in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts. To the examples mentioned by R. Wischnitzer⁴ we should add the four scenes depicted in an

¹ Universitätsbibliothek, pal. germ. 17, fols 262^v-269^r, see Hans Wegener, *Beschreibendes Verzeichnis der deutschen Bilder-Handschriften des späten Mittelalters in der Heidelberger Universitäts-Bibliothek* (Leipzig, 1927), p. 78.

² MS. germ. fol. 565, fols. 511^v-523^v. See Hans Wegener, *Beschreibende Verzeichnisse der Miniaturen-Handschriften der Preussischen Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*, vol. v, *Die deutschen Handschriften bis 1500* (Leipzig, 1928), p. 89.

³ See Edgar Wind, "The Subject of Botticelli's 'Derelitta'," in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, iv (1940-1), 114-17.

⁴ In two articles, "Der Estherstoff in der jüdischen Illustration", in *Monatschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 74 (n. s., vol. 38, 1930), pp. 381-4, and "The Esther Story in Art", in *The Purim Anthology*, ed. Philip Goodman (Philadelphia, 1949), pp. 224-8, she points out the following manuscripts: (a) MS. 1106, formerly in the Library at Breslau. (As the result of a recent enquiry to the Keeper of Manuscripts at this Library, I was informed that there are no illuminated Hebrew manuscripts in Breslau); (b) The Machzor of the University Library at Leipzig (several reproductions are to be found in *The Purim Anthology, passim*); (c) The Bible formerly in the collection of the Jewish community of Cracow, reproduced in Zofia Ameisenowa, *Biblia hebrajska XIVgo wieku w Krakowie i jej dekoracja malarska* (Cracow, 1929); (d) The Machzor at the Landesbibliothek, Darmstadt, MS. Or. 13, reproduced in Bruno Italiener, *Die Darmstädter Pessach-Haggadah* (Leipzig, 1927), Pl. 9; (e) The Siddur, MS. 24 of the former Rothschild Collection (Paris), now at the Bezalel National Museum at Jerusalem, reproduced in D. H. Müller and J. von Schlosser, *Die Haggadah von Sarajevo* (Vienna, 1898), Pl. 38; (f) The Duke of Alba Bible (see the edition of 1920-2 and Jacob Leveen, *The Hebrew Bible in Art* (London, 1944), p. 92, for details of the midrashic elements in the illustrations to the Book of Esther in this Bible).

important illuminated Hebrew manuscript of the end of the thirteenth century.¹ Among these, there is a "Triumph of Mordecai",² and this subject recurs in a Bible of German origin dating from the beginning of the fifteenth century, now at Parma³ and so far not mentioned in any publication. In the Machzur formerly in the Old Synagogue at Worms, dating from the end of the thirteenth century, we find a depiction of the hanging of the ten sons of Haman.⁴ In the Bavarian State Library Munich is a Bible with a figured "Masora", also showing Haman and his sons.⁵ Another Hebrew Bible, this time of Spanish origin, contains an illustration of Ahasuerus with a sceptre in his hand.⁶ Haman and his ten sons hanging from a large tree are represented in a Bible dating from 1344 in the collection of Rabbi S. D. Sassoon.⁷

Finally, we must not omit a rather unusual illustration in a fourteenth-century Bible in the Bibliothèque Nationale.⁸ For the text where the death of the ten sons of Haman is mentioned (Esther ix. 7-10), a slightly coloured drawing in the left hand margin of the page shows two parallel bars one above the other, supported by upright posts, thus forming a kind of double gallows. To each of these bars are tied five short pieces of rope, giving a mysterious impression, as no trace of even a part of a human figure or of the lower end of the nooses is to be seen. The artist's intention not to represent a human figure must have been the reason for this very personal depiction of the scene. We shall see later that in almost all illustrated *megilloth* the death

¹ London, British Museum Add. MS. 11639, fol. 524^r, 527^v and 260^v. Cf. Leveen, op. cit. p. 80.

² Fol. 527^v, reproduced *ibid.* Pl. XXVII, 2.

³ Biblioteca Palatina, Cod. De Rossi 893—MS. Parma 2823, fol. 352^r.

⁴ This Machzor is now in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem.

⁵ Cod. Hebr. 2, fol. 261. See Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Handschriften der königlichen Hof- und Staatsbibliothek in München* (Munich, 1895). The author does not give the date of this manuscript.

⁶ See Z. Ameisenowa, "Eine spanisch-jüdische Bilder-Bibel um 1400", in *MGWJ*, 81 (1937), pp. 193 ff.

⁷ MS. 506. See David Solomon Sassoon, Ohel Dawid, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the Sassoon Library* (London, 1932), i. 20.

⁸ MS. Hebr. 53, fol. 130^r.

of the ten sons of Haman is shown as a gallows scene, complete with bodies. In MS. Hebr. 53 at Paris the artist nowhere represents a human figure, although he shows various animals and birds, or in most cases plants or ornamental motifs.

From the various examples given here, whether the products of Christian or Jewish artists, we can conclude that the story of Esther was well known throughout the Middle Ages; but we must also add that it does not appear very frequently. The stained glass window at the Sainte-Chapelle, with its large number of scenes, must be considered an exception in medieval Christian art.

As for Jewish art, the whole attitude towards the illustration of the Book of Esther changed from the moment that artists began to illustrate the *megillah*, that is, a text written on a scroll, following the instructions given in the Talmud.¹ We have evidence that the Jews were already writing the Book of Esther on a scroll and reading it in this form in the period when the second Temple still existed, i.e. before the common era. This way of reading it has not changed down to the present day.

From the existing documents we cannot discover when or where Jews had first begun to illustrate the *megillah*, even with the most rudimentary designs. It is well established that the oldest extant illuminated Hebrew manuscripts date from the tenth century; these were found in the Gheniza of Cairo² and were undoubtedly produced in the Near East, under the influence of Islamic art. But no illustrated *megillah* was found among these fragments. If no document prior to the tenth century or even later exists, to what date can we ascribe the beginnings of the illustration of the *megillah*? It seems useless to establish hypotheses without supporting documents. Even had illustrated *megilloth* existed at the time of the tenth-century manuscripts mentioned above, we can assume that they would have had a floral design similar to the ones in the illustrated Hebrew

¹ See *The Masechet Soferim*. Cf. Joel Müller, *Der talmudische Tractat der Schreiber, eine Einleitung in das Studium der althebräischen Graphik, der Masora und der altjüdischen Liturgie* (Leipzig, 1878).

² The most important of these illuminated manuscripts are in the Public Library at Leningrad. Cf. D. Gunzburg and V. Stassoff, *L'ornement hébraïque* (Berlin, 1905).

manuscripts from the Gheniza, in which no human figure is represented.

Whatever the development of the illustration of Hebrew manuscripts may have been in Mohammedan countries, the examples we have from Jewish communities in North Africa, even of comparatively recent date, do not contain representations of human figures ; there is merely a geometrical design. This applies to the few *megilloth* written and ornamented in North Africa from the seventeenth century onwards which are known to us.¹

The tradition of illustrating the *megillah* in Western Europe during the Middle Ages is, however, quite different. Although illuminated Hebrew manuscripts exist, dating from perhaps the end of the thirteenth century onwards, no illustrated or even decorated *megillah* can be ascribed to a date preceding the second half of the fifteenth century. The date put forward for a *megillah* formerly at Pressburg (the beginning of the fourteenth century (1302)) has already been refuted by R. Wischnitzer,² who gives it a later date. A. L. Mayer, though devoting a mere sentence to the matter,³ considers the end of the fifteenth century as the probable date for the beginning of the illustration of the *megillah* though he gives no example for the fifteenth century or even later, while Mrs. Wischnitzer ventures a less definite statement on this point by stating that "the earliest-known illustrated *Megillah* is of the sixteenth century, but the tradition probably goes back to the Middle Ages".⁴

It is in fact Mrs. Wischnitzer's hypothesis that the illustrated Hebrew Bibles attributed to the end of the thirteenth century served as models for the illustrated *megilloth*.⁵ She repeats this in a more recent study on the subject.⁶ The same point

¹ We may mention two examples in the collection of M. Victor Klagsbald, Paris, and one at the Joods Historisch Museum, Amsterdam (Inv. No. 44).

² See *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, "Esther-Rolle in der Kunst", vol. vi (1930), col. 810, where Mrs. Wischnitzer states that this *Megillah* had been exhibited at the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition, London, 1887.

³ See B. Italiener, op. cit., in which Mayer collaborated, p. 52.

⁴ *The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, 1942), vol. vii, col. 641.

⁵ Op. cit. in *MGWJ*, p. 381 : "In der Bibel wurde ihm [the *megillah*] die Ausschmückung des Estherbuches zugewiesen".

⁶ Op. cit. in *The Purim Anthology*. See further below, p. 183.

has been recently taken up by Cecil Roth,¹ who not only holds the same views, mentioning amongst his examples the same Hebrew Bible of the Breslau Stadtbibliothek (codex 1106) to which she alludes, but even goes so far as to suggest the existence of a possible tradition of *megillah* illustration going as far back as the third century and exemplified by the frescoes in the Dura-Europos synagogue.

This suggestion is hard to accept, since on the one hand we have no Jewish illustrations of the Book of Esther dating from the intervening period (third-thirteenth centuries), while, on the other hand, examples of illustrations of the Book of Esther are not unknown in medieval Christian art even before the thirteenth century. Whatever the influence of the Dura-Europos frescoes on early Christian art (which is not the subject of this article) it seems highly improbable that the Jewish artist of the thirteenth century should still have had any links with this earlier tradition, or that he had the material possibility of going back to it.

Having no documentary evidence one way or the other on this subject, is it not more likely that the thirteenth century Jewish artist should have found a precedent in the Christian art of his time and have accepted its manner of representing the scenes of the Old Testament and, more particularly in our case, of the Book of Esther? This seems all the more probable when we remember that in the Near East the Jewish artists of the tenth century had accepted the forms and manner familiar to them through Islamic art.

Whatever the decoration of the Scroll of Esther may have looked like before the second half of the fifteenth century, if it existed at all, it must obviously have been subordinated to the text. In the Hebrew codex, quite independently of its contents, whether Bible, Prayer-Book or philosophical work, the scribe had freedom to leave as much space as he wished at the end of a chapter or the beginning of a new one, or between one prayer and the next, according to his own desire or the wishes of someone else, for instance the artist who was to illustrate the page. The scribe could also leave space for large or small initial

¹ See Cecil Roth, "The John Rylands Haggadah", BULLETIN OF THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY, 43, (1960-1), pp. 158-9.

letters which might then be illuminated by himself or another. Thus in these codices the Jewish scribe could act as freely as the scribe of the "scriptoria" throughout the Middle Ages.

But for the illustration of the Scroll of Esther this freedom must be excluded. The text had to be written in columns, all of equal length and breadth and all in the same scroll, as in the case of the scroll of the *Tora*. It goes without saying that the dimensions of these columns could vary from scroll to scroll, as no standard size for the breadth or even length of the parchment is prescribed. Thus we have uniformity in the dimensions of the text columns in each particular scroll but the greatest variety in these dimensions in different *megilloth*. Further, the text columns are nowhere interrupted by large spaces being left, as in the codex, since at places such as the beginning of a chapter the scribe only leaves a space equivalent to a few words of the text. Beginnings of paragraphs within a chapter are indicated by leaving a small space equal to about eight to ten letters of the text. The only text column in the Scroll of Esther where, in practically all the *megilloth* we have seen, there is a large space between each word and between the lines¹ is the column containing the names of the ten sons of Haman, which are written in larger letters than the text itself and spaced so that they alone occupy the length of a full column. In many illustrated *megilloth* one finds an illustration to the text at this point.

It should also be noted that there are some examples of the text written not in columns but within circles. This is known to us only from illustrated *megilloth* and is not at all in accordance with the rules of writing mentioned above. Such arrangements of the text are known from about the middle of the seventeenth century.²

¹ We know of only one exception: the *megillah* CL. 17503 at the Musée de Cluny, where the names of the sons of Haman are written in the same column as the rest of the text.

² See, for example, a hand-painted *megillah* of about 1700 at the Joods Historisch Museum, Amsterdam (Inv. No. 37), reproduced in the catalogue of the Synagoga exhibition (Frankfort, 1961), Fig. 63; an engraved *megillah* by Shalom Italia, of which there is an example at the Joods Historisch Museum (Inv. No. 43); and another at the Bezalel National Museum, Jerusalem, of which there is a reproduction in Mordechai Narkiss, "The illustrations of Shalom, the son of the

The lay-out of the text in columns or even in circles compelled the artist illustrating it to limit himself to the blank parchment at the beginning and end of the scroll, to the borders and to the space between the text columns. In no case did the illustration influence the lay-out of the text. Even in scrolls with engraved illustrations, with which we shall deal later, one can see at once that the engraver had to draw his design on the wood-block or copperplate to conform with the text column, leaving appropriate free columns for the scribe to fill in. From the Middle Ages to modern times the illustrated *megillah* has therefore been a type of decorated manuscript in which the artist has always had to conform to the free space left him by the scribe, or which the scribe was willing to leave; whereas the medieval Hebrew codex allowed the artist to produce whatever illustration he had in mind whenever he wished, leaving the scribe to fill in the rest.

The illustrator of the *megillah* was thus confined by quite definite restrictions; the only spaces at his disposal were, as we have seen, the upper and lower borders of the scroll and the spaces between the text columns. He had little freedom to give play to his artistic and decorative imagination. Compared with the illustrator of the codex, his part tended to be, by these very restrictions, a less important one. We shall see what difficulties he had to overcome and the pains to which he would often have to go to produce a pleasing design for the whole scroll.

Although we do not yet propose to deal with the iconography in detail, we may perhaps mention briefly what kinds of illustration are to be found in the extant illustrated *megilloth*.

In the first place, the designs on the greater number are undoubtedly confined to the margins and the spaces between the columns of the text. The *megilloth* whose illustrations are of this elementary, though often pleasing, character do not fall within the scope of this study. Their sole interest for us is the help they can give in establishing chronological details. In these *megilloth* we often see only a decorative floral pattern,¹ though

honourable Rabbi Mordecai Italia (1619-1655?)", (in Hebrew), in *Tarbiz*, vol. xxv (1955-56), Fig. 3.

¹ As examples we may mention a *megillah* at the British Museum (Egerton 67a), one at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, (MS. Hebr. 123), and another at

sometimes the artist has added animals or, more usually, birds¹; we even have an example where animals of a quite fantastic kind are represented in the spaces between the columns.² Indeed it is not surprising to find in all types of illustrated *megilloth* the continuous appearance of the most varied decorative patterns, as such patterns can be adapted to any margin quite independently of the spaces provided. The marginal design appears in most of the *megilloth* with historical illustrations,³ whether hand-painted or engraved.

Finally, a design in which human figures are also depicted, and which is frequently found in another type of illustration for the *megillah*, is one produced by cutting along some of the outlines of a design drawn on the parchment, so as to leave silhouettes. To make these stand out clearly, a strip of coloured silk is placed behind the full length of the scroll. The cut-out figures are often faintly coloured.⁴ This technique is not known before the eighteenth century.⁵

Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library (Heb. 4^o 197 14). Two further examples are at the Joods Historisch Museum, Amsterdam (Inv. Nos. 46, 47) and another at the Jewish Museum, Belgrade.

¹ Two very fine specimens, no doubt of the first half of the eighteenth century, are in the collection of Mr. Michael Zagayski, New York. An older, more simplified pattern, in which birds are depicted, is to be seen in a *megillah* at the Palatine Library in Parma (Cod. De Rossi 818—MS. Parma 3337).

² We have in mind a *megillah* in the collection of the Jewish community at Strasbourg, a reproduction of which is to be found in our study entitled "Le livre d'Esther. Un aperçu des manuscrits et de l'illustration enluminée", in *Bulletin de nos communautés* (Strasbourg), vol. 16, no. 5, March 1960.

³ The only exception known to us is the *megillah* in the library of the Athenaeum at Liverpool, which is described below (pp. 174 sqq.).

⁴ An example which includes human figures is at the Joods Historisch Museum, Amsterdam, (Inv. No. 40), and a further one is in the Collection of Dr. C. Roth of Oxford; the latter is reproduced by Ernest Namenyi in "The Illumination of Hebrew Manuscripts after the Invention of Printing" in *Jewish Art, an Illustrated History*, ed. Cecil Roth (London, 1961), cols. 423-54. This author mentions (loc. cit.) another *megillah* of this type to be found at the Jewish Museum in London. However, it was not included in the list of *megilloth* in their Collection provided on our enquiry. A further *megillah* of this type, but depicting only plants and animals, used to be in the Kirschstein Collection in Berlin, but we do not know its present whereabouts.

⁵ E. Namenyi, *ibid.* col. 435, suggests Italy and the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries for this type of illustration. We feel that its style indicates rather the latter date and a northern origin.

Nevertheless, by far the greater number of illustrated *megilloth* were not individually hand-painted ; their illustrations were produced by engravings, sometimes on wood-blocks, more usually on copperplate, afterwards coloured.

Several of the *megilloth* to which we shall refer contain illustrations including human figures and scenes from the Book of Esther. The scenes chosen are on the whole varied, the artists depicting whatever episode they chose rather than being bound to any particular sequence. Thus the Book of Esther itself, rather than any existing model, suggested the artists' personal choices. We shall even come across occasional *megilloth* in which almost every episode in the Book of Esther is depicted. Thus we have in the *megilloth* a very full iconographical representation of the story.

Towards the end of last century, with the awakening of interest in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts in general, scholars began to draw attention to existing Scrolls of Esther in private or public collections. The Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition in London in 1887 had among its treasures a number of such illustrated *megilloth*.¹ In his study on illuminated Hebrew manuscripts, David Kaufmann² described in detail the illustrated *megilloth* in his own collection³ and also alluded briefly⁴ to others at the Bodleian and the British Museum, known to him through an article by the Rev. Michael Adler⁵ on a *megillah* in the Parish Church at Great Yarmouth.⁶ The subject of the *megilloth*, to which only a few lines and one illustration had been devoted in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*,⁷ was for the first time brought to light in 1909 in a publication on Jewish art by Henrich Frauberger,⁸ which included a considerable number of reproductions of

¹ Cf. the Catalogue of this Exhibition, London, 1887.

² See Müller-Schlosser, *op. cit.* pp. 262-7.

³ Now in the Academy of Sciences, Budapest.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 265, note 1.

⁵ "Notes on the Jews of Yarmouth", in *The Jewish Chronicle*, 1895 (13 September), pp. 15-16.

⁶ This is an engraved *megillah* of the early seventeenth century.

⁷ Vol. viii, New York, 1904, pp. 429-30.

⁸ "Verzierte hebräische Schrift und jüdischer Buchschmuck", in *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft zur Erforschung jüdischer Kunstdenkmäler*, v-vi (1909), 12-18, and Figs. 2-18.

illustrated *megilloth*, mostly in his own private collection. Although some of his attributions are erroneous, his reproductions are important because his collection has largely been dispersed and we do not know where all the *megilloth* mentioned by him now are.¹ Almost twenty years later, Karl Schwarz wrote on the subject in the *Jüdisches Lexikon*,² where there are some reproductions of illustrated *megilloth*; unfortunately various errors have slipped into the captions. The articles signed RWB in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*³ was a further step in the classification of illustrated *megilloth* and the same author⁴ wrote the first article to appear on this subject in a review.⁵ She also wrote on the *megilloth* in the *Universal Jewish Encyclopaedia*⁶ and, finally, participated in the Purim Anthology,⁷ a collective work on the same subject. We must not omit the detailed study on Shalom Italia by Mordechai Narkiss,⁸ where the various *megilloth* attributed to this artist are described, nor the considerations devoted to the *megilloth* by Ernest Namenyi in his study of the Jewish illustrations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in general.⁹

Having given this general outline of the literature on the subject, we can bear the authors' opinions in mind in establishing the probable date of the earliest illustrated *megillah*.

¹ Some of them are in the Library of the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati. However, so far a catalogue of the *megilloth* belonging to this institution has not been published. We have heard from Mr. Zafren, the Librarian, that one is in preparation. Until its publication we cannot obtain more detailed information about them. Some others were acquired by Mr. Felix Guggenheim of Los Angeles.

² Vol. iv (1927), cols. 44-45.

³ Vol. vi (1930), cols. 810-14.

⁴ I.e. Rahel Wischnitzer-Bernstein, op. cit. *MGWJ*.

⁵ We may also mention three other articles written in local Jewish magazines hardly obtainable in libraries outside Germany: M. Stern, "Illustrierte Estherrollen" (*Gemeindeblatt*, Berlin, March 1927); R. Wischnitzer-Bernstein, "Esther" (*Gemeindeblatt*, Berlin, March 1930); Erich Toeplitz, an article in the *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, Hamburg, 1930, no. 11.

⁶ Vol. vii, pp. 438-40.

⁷ Op. cit. pp. 222-49.

⁸ Op. cit. in *Tarbiz*, xxv (1955-6), 441-51, 8 figs., and xxvi (1956-7), 87-101, Figs. 10-19.

⁹ Op. cit. See also the relevant pages (37-42) in the same author's article "La miniature juive au XVII^e et au XVIII^e siècle", in *Revue des études juives*, n.s., xvi (1957), 27-71, Pls. 1-16.

It is not so much the date as stylistic evidence which leads us to regard the *megillah* formerly in the collection of S. Kirschstein and subsequently acquired by Felix Guggenheim as the earliest. For the purposes of this study we shall call it the "Kirschstein-Guggenheim *Megillah*". The first to mention it was R. Wischnitzer, who immediately recognized its style to be the one known to us through German *Haggadah* manuscripts of the fifteenth century.¹ Though agreeing with her entirely as far as this comparison goes, we note that from the very first mention of the *megillah* she does not accept it to be as old as the *Haggadah* manuscripts themselves.² Indeed, not only does she later state that its script cannot be prior to the seventeenth century,³ she even goes so far as to claim, in a more recent study, that the manuscript is the work of forgers.⁴ However, we do not have to rely entirely on these judgements, for the reproduction of six columns of the text and the illustrations surrounding them, and the description given in the sale catalogue of the Kirschstein collection, allow us to some extent to reconsider its dating. In addition, David Diringer reproduces the four last columns,⁵ thus providing a further illustration of its style, although he makes no suggestion as to its date.

Mrs. Wischnitzer's suggestion that the script cannot be earlier than the seventeenth century is a personal opinion unsupported by palaeographic evidence. In fact, it is well known that the German square script scarcely changed between the late thirteenth century and the seventeenth. We attach importance, however, to the statement in the catalogue mentioned above that the manuscript can be assigned to the second half of the fifteenth century, a view supported by the great expert on illuminated manuscripts, A. Goldschmidt. If we compare the details of the *Megillah* reproduced in the works mentioned above with medieval manuscripts, we arrive at a similar conclusion.

¹ Cf. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. vi, col. 810. Formerly in the possession of the German National Museum in Nuremberg, these two manuscripts are now in the Schocken Library in Jerusalem.

² Reproductions of some of the miniatures in these two *Haggadoth* are to be found in Müller-Schlosser, *op. cit.* Pls. XIII-XX.

³ See *op. cit.* *MGWJ*, p. 385.

⁴ See *The Purim Anthology*, p. 231.

⁵ David Diringer, *The Illuminated Book* (London, 1958), Pl. IV, no. 25b.



PLATE I

- (a) Left: Adam and Eve. Detail from the Kirschstein-Guggenheim *Megillah*. German. Fifteenth century, second half.
- (b) Bottom right: Adam and Eve. Detail from the Haggadah Nuremberg I. German. Early fifteenth century.
- (c) Top right: Detail from the Haggadah Nuremberg II. German. Fifteenth century, second half.



PLATE II

(a) Top left: The two colophons of the Rylands *Megillah*. The upper one shows the date 1511, the lower the date 1618.

(b) Top right: The Synagogue scene in the Rylands *Megillah*.

(c) Bottom: Cartouche and colophon of the Castelnuovo *Megillah*. Italian. Mid-sixteenth century.



PLATE III

- (a) Top left: Inscriptions with date on the Liverpool Athenaeum *Megillah*. Late seventeenth century.
- (b) Bottom: Inscriptions with dates on the Liverpool Athenaeum *Megillah*.
- (c) Top right: Haman and Mordecai. A scene from the *Megillah* in University College, London. Seventeenth century, second half.



PLATE IV

Part of the Liverpool Athenaeum *Megillah*. Late seventeenth century.

In the Kirschstein-Guggenheim *Megillah* we find traces of a kind of illustration known in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts. The trefoil decoration in some of the margins,¹ sprouting from short stems running along the text column but attached to the upper and lower borders, is typical of the marginal decoration in illuminated fourteenth-century and even late thirteenth-century manuscripts, particularly in France and England. By the beginning of the fifteenth century this type of stiff marginal design had virtually disappeared, giving way to a less rigid form of trefoil and stem filling most of the margin. Besides these decorative elements, we find others reminiscent of romanesque art, such as acanthus leaves and round arches, while knot-work, an even more ancient decorative pattern which also occurs frequently in romanesque art, is repeated between the various scenes in the lower and upper borders. Together with these earlier types of decoration, those of the gothic period also invariably appear. We find the most varied kinds of architectural elements; the ogee arches in particular bring us close to the fifteenth century.

The figures have costumes which suggest the end of the fourteenth century or the beginning of the fifteenth. They bear a slight resemblance to the "drôleries" well known throughout the fourteenth century in that in some of the scenes their gestures tend to be exaggerated. However, in the Kirschstein-Guggenheim *Megillah* the figures generally form fairly harmonized wholes; they show a great deal of freedom in their movements which are, however, not overstressed, so that here we find ourselves at some distance from fourteenth-century "drôleries". Compare for instance the scenes in the last column of the *Megillah*, showing merry dancers, with a similar scene in a *Haggadah* also of the second half of the fifteenth century,² where some men are to be seen in almost identical poses.

Thus we find in this *Megillah* stylistic details from the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries, but none of a later period.

¹ Cf. Diringer, loc. cit.

² This *Haggadah* is in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS. Hebr. 1333, fol. 38^r. A reproduction of this miniature is to be found in Müller-Schlosser, op. cit.

Therefore we can assume that its illustration was carried out towards the end of the fifteenth century, as Goldschmidt suggested. We must consequently exclude Mrs. Wischnitzer's suggestion that it was not illuminated before the seventeenth century, as the script had led her to suppose, and that it might even have been the work of forgers. At that period no connoisseur was sufficiently attracted to the art of the Middle Ages for forgers to have found it worth while to offer such a "medieval" work for sale.

Besides the reproduction of almost half of the *Megillah*, we also possess short descriptions of all the scenes¹ in the Sale Catalogue of the Kirschstein collection.² They are as follows:

(1) The King's banquet. (2) Vashti's refusal to obey the King's order. (3) The King and his seven counsellors. (4) Vashti's punishment. (5) The King chooses a successor to Vashti. (6) The King in the palace courtyard. (7) Esther becomes Queen. (8) Mordecai overhears the plotting of Bigthan and Teresh. (9) Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman. (10) Haman is authorized to destroy the Jews. (11) The messengers bearing Haman's orders are dispatched. (12) Mordecai in mourning. (13) Mordecai gives Hatach a copy of Haman's decree.³ (14) Hatach brings Esther the copy of the decree. (15) The King receives Esther. (16) The King and Haman dine with Esther. (17) Haman has the gallows built. (18) The King is read to; Haman in the courtyard. (19) The triumph of Mordecai. (20) Haman is warned by his wife and friends. (21) Haman is taken prisoner. (22) The hanging of Haman. (23) The King and Esther. (24) Messengers are dispatched with the King's new decree. (25) The King and Mordecai.⁴

¹ A first but incomplete list of the scenes is given by R. Wischnitzer, *op. cit.* *MGWJ*, p. 385.

² *Die Judaica Sammlung S. Kirschstein, Berlin* (Munich, 1932), p. 10, no. 182. We give here a free translation of the German text.

³ In our opinion this scene represents rather the last words of Mordecai to Hatach, as the reproduction in the Sale Catalogue (Pl. VII) seems to show. Mrs. Wischnitzer's numbering of the columns seems inaccurate at this point; where she sees the king ordering Vashti's dismissal, we have in fact Mordecai and Hatach. What she describes as "column 6" is in fact column 7; moreover, she misinterprets the two scenes in this column.

⁴ We also see the people rejoicing.

(26) The Feast of the Jews. (27) The Jews' defence. (28) The hanging scene. (29) The King and Esther. (30) The Jews distribute gifts to the sick and needy. (31) Mordecai writes the account of the events. (32) Mordecai reads this account to the people. (33, 34) Tumblers.

Besides the illustrations depicting the historical scenes, there are diamond-shaped frames containing human figures in some of the columns of vertical decoration between the text. In the sections which have been reproduced two can be identified. First (Pl. I(a)), Adam and Eve standing on either side of the Tree of Life, around whose trunk the serpent is coiled, Eve holding the apple in her hand, and, second, Jonah swallowed by the whale. These two scenes, painted in an almost identical manner, are also to be found in the so-called *Haggadah* Nuremberg I (Pl. I(b)),¹ though they are there placed within medallions, so that it seems likely that the artist of the *Megillah* had a manuscript of this kind as a model; we know that the *Haggadah* is not later than the early fifteenth century. In the late fifteenth-century *Haggadah* Nuremberg II there are also certain points of comparison, not as regards the human figures but rather in some of the decorative patterns, such as a gothic architectural detail which occurs in both manuscripts (Pl. I(a) and (c)).² To the view advanced by Mrs. Wischnitzer that the artist of the Kirschstein-Guggenheim *Megillah* copied the style of the fifteenth-century German *Haggadoth*, we would like to add that we even find in this *Megillah* certain elements of fourteenth-century Spanish *Haggadoth*, of which the most striking example is British Museum, Add. MS. 2737. The round arches forming a decorative pattern between the text columns of the *Megillah* have the same function in some of the miniatures in this Spanish *Haggadah*.³ We can thus conclude that the artist, having chosen as his models miniatures ranging from the fourteenth to the late fifteenth century from different geographical regions, but all contained in Jewish manuscripts, was well acquainted with the Jewish art of the period, in the spirit and tradition of which he was working.

¹ See fol. 18^v and 27^v; reproduced in Müller-Schlosser, op. cit. Pls. XIII, XIV.

² Cf. Müller-Schlosser, op. cit. Pl. XIX.

³ Ibid. Pl. V, Fig. c.

It appears from the various illustrations of the Book of Esther mentioned that at least before the end of the fifteenth century a cycle of illustrations for it had been established in German Jewish (*ashkenaze*) communities. It is most unfortunate that from that period till the seventeenth century no illustrated *megillah* originating from an *ashkenaze* community has survived.

Let us now consider the illustrated *megilloth* in the two other most important regions of Europe, Italy and the Iberian Peninsula.

From the latter region, owing to the final expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal towards the end of the fifteenth century and in the early sixteenth, one cannot expect to find illustrated *megilloth* of the sixteenth century or later. Although H. Frauberger¹ and later Mrs. Wischnitzer² have published illustrations from illuminated *megilloth* which they assign to Spain, it scarcely seems difficult to refute their attributions. Some were no doubt written by Jews of Spanish descent who had learnt to write the Hebrew text in sephardic script, obviously slightly different in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from the script used at that time by *ashkenaze* scribes. However, such palaeographic considerations have no determining place in a study concerned with the style of the illustrations. It would seem that the two authors concerned based their conclusions on a script which appeared to be of Spanish origin, without considering the question of illustration. We should add that no illustrated Spanish *megillah* has come to light so far. The oldest non-illustrated ones date from the fifteenth century,³ which is incidentally the same period as the earliest *ashkenaze megilloth*.

¹ See op. cit. *MGEjK*, V/VI, where various *megilloth* of the seventeenth and even of the eighteenth centuries (e.g. Figs. 11, 13, 14, 15), are described as "Spanish".

² Her illustration is to be found unnumbered in the article op. cit., in the *Gemeindeblatt*, Berlin, p. 127. Although no date is given, it must date from the eighteenth century; it is described as "Spanish".

³ For instance in the Collection of Rabbi D. S. Sassoon there is a *megillah* of the fifteenth century supposed to have been brought from Portugal. See the Catalogue, *Ohel Dawid*, vol. 1, p. 558, MS. 361. Among the undecorated *megilloth* in the British Museum we find in Margoliouth's catalogue under the numbers Add. 8132 and Or. 1087, the note: "Sephardi hand, probably of the fifteenth century." See *Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1900-12), vol. i, no. 30 (p. 15) and no. 38 (p. 17), respectively.

Megilloth dating from before the fifteenth century are not to be found even in Italy. The first with hand-drawn decorations is of great importance as it bears the date 1567 (Pl. II(c)). This, the oldest dated decorated *megillah*,¹ has a colophon within an elaborately drawn frame which reads :² “ The whole work was completed during the night and not the day by the hand of the young Jacob Zoraff, son of the most honoured Rabbi Solomon Zoraff of Castelnuovo, may his memory be blessed, when the appointed lesson was [here follows the biblical quotation], in the year 5327 of the Creation [= 1567] ”.³

Above the colophon is a circular cartouche with a winged female figure-head on either side of it, typical of the sixteenth century. The inside is divided into two unequal halves : in the upper are two hands, whose outstretched fingers are parted in the middle, symbolizing the priestly benediction and beneath, a lion rampant against the right-hand side of a palm tree, the lion symbolizing Judah, the tree Israel.⁴ Above the cartouche an inscription states that the owner was a certain Samuel, son of Rabbi Aaron, the priest.

Apart from brief mentions, the manuscript has never been studied in detail.⁵ From our point of view, it has no particular importance since it contains no scenes. Its general lay-out is simple, the text columns being separated by what amount to Corinthian columns around which various kinds of foliage are

¹ This *Megillah* is now in the Jewish National and University Library at Jerusalem (Hebr. 4° 197 20) ; it was formerly in the collection of S. Nauheim at Frankfort.

² The text of this colophon is given in the original in I. Yoel, “ Catalogue of the *megilloth* in the Jewish National Library, Jerusalem ” (in Hebrew), *Kirjath Sepher*, 32 (1956-7), p. 238, no. 19.

³ An incomplete translation into German is given in George Swarzenski and Rosy Schilling, *Die illuminierten Handschriften und Einzelminiaturen des Mittelalters und der Renaissance im Frankfurter Besitz* (Frankfort, 1929), p. 263.

⁴ Note that the drawing of the priest's hands, the lion and the palm tree are in a second hand. Perhaps it was added to the cartouche by the later owner, “ Samuel, son of the honourable Rabbi Aaron, the priest ”. The name of this latter has been added, a former name having apparently been rubbed out.

⁵ This *Megillah* has been mentioned by Franz Landsberger in his *History of Jewish Art* (Cincinnati, 1946), p. 359, note 61, as the earliest dated Esther Scroll, adding that another Italian scroll was auctioned at Vienna. We were unable to obtain the catalogue of the sale in question.

twined, and the lower border alternating between balustrades and a formal design depicting peacocks and plants, while the upper border acts as a cornice to the columns and is decorated in layers composed of formal patterns. Though the work is pleasing, it is obvious that the artist made no attempt to vary his design or to introduce elements other than purely decorative ones. It is precisely this kind of illustration which prevails in the majority of Italian decorated *megilloth*.

We enter a new phase in *megillah* illustration in Italy some half a century after the date of the Castelnuovo *Megillah*, with the appearance of the type of which the Rylands *Megillah* is probably the unique survivor. This manuscript¹ has unfortunately not received the attention it deserves. We know that it was exhibited at the Universal Jewish Historical Exhibition in London in 1887,² and again in 1958 at the John Rylands Library itself.³ Moreover, Roth has devoted some lines to it in his article on the Rylands *Haggadah*.⁴ Namenyi⁵ too has mentioned it in a cursory way.

Before turning to the question of its date, let us look at the illustrations in greater detail. The scroll, 285 mm. high and 14½ ft. long, is divided into twenty-nine columns written on ten sheets of vellum, three on the first nine, two on the last.

The text, which occupies just over half the total height of the scroll, is bordered underneath by a continuous band less wide than the upper illustrated border, and bearing a symmetrical design. Beneath the middle text column of each sheet, a small frame contains pictures of birds or animals, or, in the case of the final frame, an inscription, to which we shall return. On either side of these frames are tendrils terminating in flowers, amongst which birds of all kinds are depicted; the tendrils are separated from the frames by griffins. The text columns are divided by bands also depicting a floral pattern reminiscent of printed book designs. The upper border, the most important element in the

¹ Ryl. Hebrew MS. 22. Formerly in the collection of the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres.

² See under no. 2190 in the Catalogue already mentioned, p. 142.

³ *The John Rylands Library, Manchester: Catalogue of an Exhibition of Hebrew Manuscripts and Printed Books together with other Items of Jewish Interest* (Manchester, 1958), pp. 10–11, no. 7, and Pl. 7.

⁴ Roth, *op. cit.* p. 158.

⁵ Namenyi, *op. cit.* in *Jewish Art*, col. 432.

decorative scheme, is divided into twenty-eight scenes and a colophon. These correspond in breadth to the text columns beneath and are separated from each other by vases containing flowers, themselves contained between extensions of the bands separating the text columns. At the beginning and end of each sheet these vases are replaced by standing naked female figures ; thus at the seams joining the sheets these figures are face to face.

The scenes depicted in the upper border are : (1) The King seated on his throne, before him his counsellors (i. 2-3). (2) The King and others seated at a table (probably the banquet) (i. 5). (3) The King and his officers (i. 8). (4) Vashti's feast with her women (i. 9). (5) The King and his seven chamberlains (i. 10). (6) Vashti's refusal to obey the King's orders (i. 12). (7) Vashti's execution (not in the text). (8) Esther before the King (ii. 17). (9) Haman before the King (iii. 1). (10) Mordecai refuses to bow before Haman (iii. 5). (11) Haman dictates the decree (iii. 12). (12) Mordecai in mourning rends his clothes (iv. 1). Note certain details in the artist's depiction of this event, such as the turned-down hat-brims. (13) Hatach before Esther (iv. 5). (14) Hatach brings clothing to Mordecai (not in text) and the copy of the writing with an inscription on it, which is in fact an incomplete quotation from verse 8. (15) Hatach brings the copy of the decree to Esther (iv. 9). Note the same Hebrew inscription. (16) The Jews praying in the Synagogue (iv. 16). Note that they are wearing the prayer-shawl in the traditional manner, covering their heads (Pl. II(b)). The drawing is meticulous and gives an interesting idea of a service as the artist saw it. (17) Esther before the King (v. 2). (18) The King is read to at night (vi. 1). (19) Haman before the King ; the apparel, horse and crown are brought (vi. 8). (20) The triumph of Mordecai (vi. 11). Note the window through which a woman is looking ; this refers to the incident recorded in the Talmud,¹ which

¹ *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. I. Epstein (London, The Soncino Press, 1938), vol. viii, *The Tractate Megillah*, 16a, *ibid.* p. 95 : " As he was leading him through the streets where Haman lived, his daughter, who was standing on the roof saw him. She thought that the man on the horse was her father and the man walking before him was Mordecai. So she took a chamber pot and emptied it on the head of her father. He looked up at her and when she saw that it was her father, she threw herself from the roof to the ground and killed herself."

is however not fully depicted. (21) Zeresh and the wise men warn Haman (vi. 13). (22) The chamberlains fetch Haman (vi. 14). (23) The banquet of Haman and the King with Esther (vii. 6). The latter points out Haman. (24) The King in the palace garden (vii. 7). Note the only use of trees in the manuscript, in order to make the setting evident. (25) Haman pleading (vii. 8). (26) The hanging of Haman, two armed soldiers standing beside him (vii. 10). (27) The hanging of the ten sons (ix. 6–10). (28) The Jews giving each other presents (ix. 19). (29) The colophon: a cartouche surrounded by simplified scroll-work and containing a lion rampant against a palm; here again, the lion symbolizes Judah, the palm Israel (Pl. II(a)).

Having summarized these scenes, let us consider their artistic interest and thus try to establish the date of the *Megillah*. In the first place, we are struck by their liveliness. They have broken away from the stiff and clumsy illustrations of the Kirschstein-Guggenheim *Megillah*. The banqueting and court scenes reflect the court life of the period, as does the scene of the Synagogue interior. The illustrations express the spirit of the late Renaissance, even if they are not very elegantly executed. Secondly, we note the meticulous detail of the costumes, which are mostly those of the nobility. We notice, too, the introduction of oriental or Turkish costumes, especially for Haman and his wife, showing that the artist was aware of their existence. Moreover, these costumes are of particular help in establishing the probable date of the Scroll. On this point we have the views of Namenyi and Roth, the former suggesting a date at least two generations after 1512,¹ the latter "the close of the century".² The date 1511 is taken from the inscription on the rim of the cartouche or upper colophon, which reads thus:³

תם ונשלם ביום י"ב לחדש אדר שנת ה'רע"א

(Completed on the twelfth day of the month Adar, the year 5271.) There can be no doubt as to the exactness of this reading,

¹ Namenyi, loc. cit. 1512 is a misreading for 1511.

² Roth, loc. cit.

³ A translation has already been published in the Rylands Exhibition Catalogue already cited.

yet no connection can be found between this date and the style of the manuscript ; certainly both Roth and Namenyi are right in considering the *Megillah* to be of more recent date.

Let us return to the costumes. We note first the broad ruffs, unknown before the last quarter of the century. The wide collars of the women, too, show a fashion scarcely known before the beginning of the seventeenth century, and similar to that found in the portraits by F. Pourbus, who was working in France from 1600–10, from which the fashion probably derived. The oriental costumes, too, were more widely known in the seventeenth century, though depictions of them are not unknown in the sixteenth. Further, the soldiers are shown wearing helmets and armour of late sixteenth-century style. There is therefore no doubt that the *Megillah* cannot have been illustrated in 1511, and cannot in fact, date from earlier than the late sixteenth century.

Let us try to determine the exact date. We are helped in this by a second colophon, contained in the lower border in the last frame (Pl. II(a)). The script is typical of Italian cursive of the late sixteenth century. So far no one has deciphered it, and it is here that we find a clue to the actual date. It reads as follows :

על פי הגורל יצאה לחלק בני בנימין
 מקאסטיל / בולונייסי יום פורים משנת
 שך עין חית לפק /
 מידי היתה זאת צעיר וקט במעשיו
 משה בן הגאון / כמהר"ר אברהם
 פשקרול ולה' נכתב פה פירארי' /
 יום הששי פרשת ומשה לא ידע כי
 קרן עור פניו בדברו / אתו ה' יזכני
 להתהיל ולהשלים מגילות אחרות
 / רבות

(Chance made it become the property of my son Benjamin, of Castelbolognese,¹ on the Day of Purim 5378.² By my hand it is, Moses, the young and humble in his works, son of the Gaon, the highly honoured Rabbi Abraham Pescarol [?], may he be

¹ Near Ravenna.

² I.e. 1618.

remembered for the world to come ; written here in Ferrara the sixth day [of the week] when the text is : ‘ And Moses knew not that the skin of his face shone, because he had spoken with him ’.¹ May God grant I begin and complete many other *megilloth*.)

In no publication have we found any reference to this colophon. In the catalogue of the London Exhibition of 1887, however, the description of the scroll mentions certain details which can only have been taken from this inscription, namely that “ it formed an heirloom of a Jewish family, at first in Ferrara, then in Bologna ”. The words “ heirloom ”, “ Bologna ”, and “ Ferrara ” seem to bear some relation to the colophon, “ heirloom ”² being a misinterpretation and “ Bologna ” a misreading of the first words of the inscription. The catalogue, however, does not give the date 5378, keeping to 1511, the date in the upper colophon. Doubtless the writer was unable to read the former, whereas the latter is quite clear.

The date in the lower colophon obviously corresponds to the style of the illustrations and to the types of costume depicted. It is beyond all doubt the more likely date. We must, however, account for the date 1511. Was it added out of ignorance, or with a deliberate intention to mislead?

If the writer had intended to repeat the date in the lower colophon in square characters in order to make it more legible, he could scarcely have misread it to such an extent, since the difference extends to the first and last of the three characters of the original date. On the other hand, if the intention had been to deceive, why leave the date in the lower colophon? The only answer seems to be that a later owner had been misled in the reading of the date and had, in all good faith, added what he, or family tradition, held to be the correct date, i.e. the 12th Adar 5271 (probably an allusion to the fact that Benjamin had acquired it on the Day of Purim, the 14th Adar). We may well believe that the sole intention of the inscription which has led to the problem of dating was to record a family-held tradition as to its age. The fact that the script of the upper colophon is later than

¹ Exodus xxxiv. 29.

² The Hebrew expression here for “ chance ” is an allusion to its synonym Purim which is the Feast of the “ casting of Pur, that is, the lot ” (Esther iii. 7).

that of the *Megillah* itself supports our hypothesis ; it no doubt dates from the eighteenth century¹.

In conclusion, the date 1511 can be dismissed as the date of execution, all the evidence being against it. The date in the lower colophon is, on the contrary, not only in perfect harmony with the style and the manner of the illustrations but also agrees with the conclusions we have already drawn from the costumes.

Though the earlier date must be rejected and a later one substituted, the Rylands *Megillah* remains the earliest example extant of an Italian illustrated *megillah*. We can thus conclude by stating that 1618 is the date of the oldest Italian *megillah* illustrated with scenes from the Book of Esther.²

A *megillah* obviously written without any intention of illustration, yet illustrated nevertheless, is the one at the Musée de Cluny at Paris (CL. 12263). It measures only 162 mm. in height and its illustrations are confined to the narrow spaces between the text columns and to the narrow space preceding the text itself. This *megillah* is very little known. It is not described in the catalogue of the museum, which acquired it as part of the Strauss Collection. It was exhibited however at the Synagoga Exhibition at Recklinghausen and Frankfort in 1961. In the Catalogue of the former, under B 52, it is attributed to Italy or southern France and to the year 1600.

As to the illustrations, we notice the total absence of any on the same subject as the text. Instead, the only two illustrations including human figures³ depict first, on the space preceding the text, a rather unusual representation of Adam and Eve actually in the Tree, Adam sitting on a branch and Eve standing in front of him, offering him the apple. Below, four birds are

¹ In the Rylands Exhibition *Catalogue* cited, the colophon is said to be "apparently in the same hand as the text".

² In *The Purim Anthology*, p. 231, R. Wischnitzer states: "A handpainted Megillah, produced in 1616 in Ferrara has turned up recently in a private collection". It is a pity that Mrs. Wischnitzer does not give a short description of this *megillah*, telling us whether or not it contains scenes from the Book of Esther, and, if so, which. It would also be interesting to know in which country the collection is to be found.

³ Both these pictures are reproduced in the *Catalogue* of the Recklinghausen Synagoga Exhibition (Fig. B 52).

depicted, forming a rectangle and drawn on a scale larger than the picture above them. Their purpose is purely decorative. The other illustration, between the first and second columns, is not even connected with the Bible. It depicts a naked child holding a book and seated beneath the trunk of a dead tree on which are perched two birds similar to those already mentioned; below, a white rabbit is to be seen beneath a cluster of fruit. The illustration defies interpretation.

The remaining drawings, all between the text columns, depict various fabulous creatures as well as birds and plants. The aim again is purely decorative; the excellent penmanship, especially in these latter drawings, indicates a skilled hand. It seems as though the decoration of the Scroll was commissioned, and that the artist, ignoring the contents of the *Megillah*, filled it with drawings of his own invention, though beginning with a suitably biblical subject since he was aware that the Hebrew scroll was of a biblical character.

As for the statement in the Catalogue of the Recklinghausen Exhibition that the scroll is of Italian or southern French provenance, may we suggest a different origin? The script is indeed southern in character, perhaps Spanish, and the grotesques could be said to be Italian of the later sixteenth century. But the first two scenes have nothing in common with Italian painting of the period or even of the early seventeenth century. On the contrary, they bear strong marks of being of Flemish origin. For instance, the figures of Adam and Eve, more frequent in northern painting, are in the sixteenth-century Flemish manner. Moreover, in the second illustration the child is drawn in the manner of the Flemish Schools of the early seventeenth century, particularly that of Rubens and Jan Breughel; this also applies to the fruit and the trunk of the tree. The attribution of these illustrations to Italy, as given in the Catalogue, seems therefore questionable, though the *Megillah* could have been painted by a Flemish-trained artist working in Italy. However, it seems more plausible that the scroll had been brought to Flanders by Spanish Jews taking refuge, and that it was illustrated there.

It is interesting to note in a Hebrew manuscript this meeting of northern and southern elements. It seems to show that the

Jews, too, were not uninfluenced by the artistic currents of the period, and may even have commissioned works from non-Jewish artists, as is likely in this particular case.

A *megillah* certainly executed in the north of Europe, doubtless in the Netherlands, is in the Gustave Tuck Museum (no. 98) at University College, London. It has never to our knowledge been mentioned in any publication, but is recorded at the Museum as being Italian of the eighteenth century. It is written in fifteen columns alternately in the shape of arches and rectangles. A decorative border of tendrils, leaves and flowers runs above and beneath the columns. At the second and sixth rectangular text columns the borders are interrupted by illustrations in rectangular frames, while at the fourth and central rectangular column we find two medallions containing lions' heads. The four illustrations, like all the decorative work in the scroll, are drawn in sepia by an artist who had mastered the technique. They depict the following scenes : above, first, Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman (Pl. III(c)), and second, Esther before Ahasuerus ; below, first, the triumph of Mordecai, and, second, the hanging of Haman.

Let us reconsider the question of its date and origin. The supposition that it is of Italian origin could hold good as to the script ; this, however, is not the subject of our study. In the illustrations, on the contrary, we see no elements indicative of the eighteenth century and very few indicative of an Italian origin. The only reminiscences of Italian art are in the arches, which appear to be built of masonry in the rough-hewn rounded blocks characteristic of late Italian Renaissance and early Baroque architecture. This alone does not prove the *Megillah's* origin, since the style had spread to France and the Netherlands in the early seventeenth century. The decoration in the borders is of no precise date and could be sixteenth or seventeenth century, as could the two medallions. It is to the four illustrations that we must look to find clearer indications.

Even if the attempt at perspective in the scene of the triumph of Mordecai to some extent recalls the Italian manner, this too is of minor significance, since northern painters were equally capable of it. More conclusive are the clothing and the attitudes

of the figures depicted in the four scenes. These can only compare with the work of artists established in the Netherlands, such as Emanuel de Witte (1617–92),¹ Jan Josephsz van Goyen (1596–1656),² or Jan Asselyn (1610–52), a northern French painter established at Amsterdam where he died.³ Comparing the illustrations of the *Megillah* with drawings such as those of these artists, we cannot help noticing a striking resemblance both in manner and composition. The way in which the figures are drawn, their solid stance and the manner in which the upper part of the bodies is thrown slightly backwards, whether they are in movement or not (for instance, Haman in the first illustration or in the scene of the triumph of Mordecai), are all very close to Dutch art of about the middle of the seventeenth century. The clothing of the figures, too, especially the loose strands falling from their shoulders and their wide hose, is also typical of the clothing worn at the same period in the Netherlands. In the hanging scene the small building of no great architectural interest cannot be imagined in Italian drawings of the time, while, finally, the scene of Esther before Ahasuerus, in a completely plain setting, is very similar in its simplicity to early seventeenth-century woodcuts in the Netherlands. If we take all these points into consideration, there can be no doubt that we have here a *megillah* illustrated by a painter working in the Netherlands about 1650.

The last *megillah* to be described in this study is the one in the Library of the Athenaeum at Liverpool.⁴ It has only been mentioned in a few lines by Namenyi⁵ and C. Roth;⁶ no other scholar has dealt with it. The main problem for these two authors was the date. It does, in fact, contain inscriptions which clearly indicate the middle of the fifteenth

¹ Cf. the drawing attributed to him reproduced in *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Die Zeichnungen alter Meister im Kupferstichkabinett*; Elfried Bock and Jacob Rosenberg, *Die Niederländischen Meister*, vol. ii (Frankfort, 1931), Pl. 217, no. 2828. ² Cf. a drawing of peasants in the above, Pl. 102, no. 12009.

³ Cf. *idem*. Pl. 56, nos. 144 and 740.

⁴ The Librarian of the Athenaeum has kindly informed me that "the Book was presented to the Athenaeum in 1828 by Moses Samuel, a wealthy silversmith who lived in Liverpool".

⁵ *Op. cit.* in *Jewish Art*, col. 431.

⁶ *Loc. cit.*

century. We wish to leave the discussion of the exact date until later but we must state that both Namenyi and Roth have rejected the dates on the inscriptions. The former has suggested that it "obviously belongs to the seventeenth-eighteenth century", whereas Dr. Roth, while not giving any precise period, nevertheless regards it as "certainly much posterior (to 1453)".

The text of the Liverpool *Megillah*, is written in sixteen columns with an additional column containing the blessings for the reading of the scroll and the prayer which customarily follows the reading. These texts are written at the beginning, the three blessings which precede the Book of Esther being contained in a circle around which are the signs of the zodiac, while the final blessing and the prayer are written inside an arch of romanesque type supported by pillars. The circle is crowned by two winged victories holding palms, while the arch is flanked by niches containing vases of flowers. In the background, part of the façade of a palace is visible. Beneath this, are two lions holding a cartouche containing a description recording the date of the completion of the scroll. We shall return to this in due course.¹

We notice in particular in this initial portion that artist and scribe collaborated in the lay-out of text and decorations. It is impossible to ascertain which of them played the dominant part and it may be that the scroll is the work of one person. This close collaboration is also evident throughout the rest of the scroll. Here the illustrations fill not only the wide upper and lower borders, but also the relatively wide spaces between the text columns. The proportion given up to illustrations is far greater than in any of the scrolls we have dealt with so far. The number of illustrations, too, is much larger, since all free space is devoted to them. Although the scenes follow a chronological sequence, the square text columns have led to the appropriate scenes being arranged around them according to the shape of the space available and the scene to be adapted to it. Therefore we shall list the scenes in chronological order, although they may not follow in exactly the same order on the scroll. Another detail worth mentioning here, and one completely omitted from the *megilloth* previously described, is the presence in each scene

¹ See below p. 180 sqq.

of Hebrew inscriptions taken from the text and explaining the illustrations: (1) The King sitting on his throne (i. 2). (2) The King's banquet (i. 5). (3) Vashti's banquet (i. 9). (4) The King calls for Vashti (i. 10, 11). (5) The execution of Vashti (not in text). (6) The messengers are dispatched with the King's decree (i. 22). (7) The young virgins are brought to the palace (ii. 3). (8) Esther before Ahasuerus (ii. 15, though the caption refers to 9). (9) Esther is crowned (ii. 17). (10) Mordecai overhears the plot (ii. 21). (11) Esther informs the King of the plot (ii. 22). (12) The plot is found out (ii. 23). Note the detail of the illustration; the King in bed casts aside his poisoned food. (13) Bigthan and Teresh are hanged (ii. 23). (14) It is written in the Book of the Chronicles (ii. 23). (15) Mordecai refuses to bow before Haman (iii. 2), while the King's servants do so. (16) Haman before the King, who is giving him his ring (iii. 10). (17) The scribes writing the decree (iii. 12). (18) The posts go out (iii. 15). (19) The King and Haman drink (iii. 15). (20) The city is perplexed; Mordecai mourning (iii. 15, iv. 1). (21) Esther hears of Mordecai's mourning (iv. 4). (22) She sends raiment to clothe Mordecai (iv. 4). (23) She calls for Hatach (iv. 5). (24) Hatach goes to Mordecai, who gives him a copy of the decree (iv. 6, 8). (25) The Jews gather in the synagogue (iv. 16). (26) Esther before the King (v. 1, 2). (27) Ahasuerus and Haman dine with Esther (v. 5). (28) Haman leaving the banquet encounters Mordecai and is indignant against him (v. 9). (29) Zeresh and all his friends advise Haman to hang Mordecai (v. 14). (30) The gallows are prepared (v. 14). (31) The King is read to at night (vi. 1). (32) Haman before the King (vi. 6). (33) Haman takes the horse to fetch Mordecai (vi. 11). (34) Haman cuts Mordecai's hair (not in text). (35) The triumph of Mordecai (vi. 11). A woman throwing a chamber pot onto Haman's head.¹ (36) Mordecai returns to the King's gate (vi. 12). (37) Haman is brought to the banquet (vi. 14). (38) The second banquet of the King and Haman with Esther (vii. 2). (39) The King goes into the palace garden (vii. 7). In the background:

¹ Compare the less developed illustration of this episode in the Rylands *Megillah* (p. 167 above).

the sons of Haman are cutting trees to make the gallows (not in text). (40) Haman makes request to Esther for his life (vii. 7); the king returns from the garden and is angry (vii. 8); Harbonah tells the King of the gallows (vii. 9). (41) The hanging of Haman (vii. 10). (42) Mordecai before the King, who is giving him the ring (viii. 1, 2). (43) Esther before the King (viii. 3). (44) The scribes write Mordecai's orders (viii. 9). (45) The posts are sent off (viii. 14). (46) Mordecai in royal apparel (viii. 15). (47) The Feast of the Jews (viii. 15). (48) The Jews receive help (ix. 3). (49) The Jews kill their enemies (ix. 5). (50) The Jews slay five hundred men in the palace (ix. 6). (51) The hanging of Haman and his ten sons (not in text). (52) The King speaks to Esther (ix. 12). (53) The Jews slay three hundred men at Shushan (ix. 15). (54) Mordecai writing (ix. 20). (55) The Feast of the Jews and the sending of gifts to each other (ix. 22). (56) The Jews sending gifts to the poor (ix. 22). (57) Mordecai riding in a carriage (not in text). (58) Esther and Mordecai writing (ix. 29). (59) The sending of the letters to all the Jews (ix. 30). (60) Mordecai speaks to the Jews (x, 3). On the platform beneath the figure of Mordecai there are two inscriptions to which we shall refer later.

Having briefly noted the illustrations in the Scroll, it may be useful to look in greater detail at one particular representation in which we find an interesting iconographic theme. This is Ahasuerus sitting on the throne of Solomon. It is the only example known to us in an illustrated *megillah* and it is all the more important as it occurs in one of the frescoes at Dura-Europos. Although we do not claim any specific connection between the two, it should be noted that in medieval art the Throne of Solomon is never connected with Ahasuerus, though it is possible that Christian theologians knew of the Jewish tradition that the Throne of Ahasuerus was the same one which Hiram of Tyre had built for Solomon. In the *Targum Sheni* to the Book of Esther, it is said that "There stood upon it [the dais of the Throne] twelve lions of gold and over against them twelve golden eagles",¹

¹ See Carl H. Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos. The Synagogue. Final Report, VIII. Part I* (New Haven, 1956), p. 90.

and we find the Throne of Solomon depicted according to this description at Dura-Europos.¹ In the Liverpool *Megillah* there are no eagles ; the six steps of the dais are decorated with lions only, so that on this point the artist has followed the biblical description (1 Kings x. 18–20), which is used in Christian iconography.²

Having described the illustrations, let us now consider their style. Is there anything in them which might suggest the middle of the fifteenth century, the period to which the scroll has been ascribed on the basis of three inscriptions in it? We can categorically state that there are no traces of fifteenth-century style. What is apparent in some of the illustrations is the style of the later sixteenth century ; for example, the view of the towns, in the scene of the departure of the messengers shows late sixteenth-century architectural forms. Further, some of the costumes, particularly those worn by soldiers, which recall classical styles, show obvious indications of influences from manneristic art. The slender and graceful figures in some of the scenes provide another indication of the artist's acquaintance with mannerism. However, he is not actively bound to it, and without doubt is most acquainted with the style of the first half of the seventeenth century and with its developments up to about 1680. The style of the royal furniture and the initial decorations, the two victories holding palms and supporting a crown, are of Louis XIII style. But the composition in some of the scenes, where the figures are shown making elaborate theatrical gestures, and where the feeling of drama is intense, are of the period of Louis XIV, about 1670–80. For example (Pl. IV), Esther reclining in a chair surrounded by her maids, who seem to share her affliction ; or the scene below, where we see Mordecai sitting on the ground, the upper part of his face covered as a sign of mourning, clearly showing that he refuses every kind of personal favour or material help ; or, finally, the one of the Jews praying in the synagogue, where all the figures are in the

¹ Panel WC2, reproduced, *ibid.* Pls. LXIV-LXV.

² Cf. Francis Wormald, "The Throne of Solomon and St. Edward's Chair", in *Essays in honor of Erwin Panofsky (De artibus opuscula XL)* (New York, 1961), pp. 532 ff.

act of prostration, and one only is seen in profile, the upper part of his body and his head being slightly raised, while the others have their faces completely covered. For this scene the artist not only strove after a realistic representation of an ordinary prayer scene in a synagogue, as in the Rylands *Megillah*,¹ but probably also had in mind the precise and only instance known to him when the Jews during their prayer are prostrated. This occurs in the course of the prayer of *Mussaf* at *Rosh-Hashanah* (the Jewish New Year) and at *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement). The artist of the Liverpool *Megillah* has also shown the doors of the Torah Shrine closed, as at the moment of prostration, whereas in the course of the preceding prayer they had remained open. We have thus here an important record of the interior of a synagogue in the second half of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth centuries.

Finally, let us add some remarks on the architecture represented in this *Megillah*. Though we have mentioned some late sixteenth-century buildings, there is in these illustrations far more architecture of the seventeenth century. Most of the façades of the palaces show elements of baroque, reminding us of the mid-seventeenth century. These façades are closest to the French style of architecture of 1650 to 1680, but we can also see in some of the scenes buildings of a typically northern type, such as are to be found in the mid-seventeenth century in Holland.² If we take into consideration all the styles, which range from the latter part of the sixteenth century to the second half of the seventeenth, we must in fact put the date of execution of this *Megillah* in the latter half of the seventeenth century, between 1660 and 1680. We do not think that it could have been completed later than 1690. Although the style points to France, this scroll also contains numerous elements deriving directly from Dutch art of the seventeenth century. As the French style was also well known in Holland at that time, we can safely suggest Holland as the country of origin.

Having established the approximate date and origin, we must now consider the problem of the date which is actually inscribed

¹ See above, p. 167.

² Cf. Pl. IV, the scene of Esther's servant bringing clothing to Mordecai.

in the Scroll which has led some scholars to attribute it to the middle of the fifteenth century, and to consider it as a product of the Italian Renaissance.¹ Only within recent years have the two scholars² already mentioned come to the inevitable conclusion that the illustrations cannot be as old as the middle of the fifteenth century.

Unfortunately, however, no attempt has so far been made to make known the inscriptions which have led to these erroneous conclusions, and thus avoid further errors as to the date. The first and most important is in the cartouche held by the two lions rampant (Pl. III(b)).³ It reads thus :

כתב זו / מתחיל בשנת / ליהודים היתה / אורה לפק //

(This has been written at the beginning of the year "The Jews had light", according to the minor reckoning.)

The date is to be obtained from the words :

ליהודים היתה אורה

(The Jews had light)⁴ by adding the numerical values of some or all of the letters composing the three words. To acquaint the reader with the date he wished to convey, the scribe usually placed signs (such as inverted commas, apostrophes or asterisks) above the letters whose numerical values correspond to it. In this case the four letters of the third word in the quotation אורה, (light) are surmounted by a drawing of foliage, which might have been added by the scribe himself to indicate that this word contains the date. Above the last letter (ה) of the word there is also the sign " † ", written in much darker ink and no doubt added by a later hand. This sign cannot be considered of any importance in determining the date. The numerical value of the word אורה is 212. This places the date of the *Megillah* in the year $[5]212 = 1451/2$, the beginning of 5212 being in 1451.

¹ The letter kindly sent to me by the Librarian of the Athenaeum, Liverpool, mentions that "The manuscript is dated 1451 and has been examined by a number of people . . ." and that it is to be considered as ". . . a very fine example of an Italian Renaissance manuscript".

² See above, pp. 174-75.

³ See above, p. 175.

⁴ The scribe of this inscription has made use of the beginning of a verse in the Book of Esther (viii. 16) which is obviously appropriate in such an inscription on a *megillah*.

There is a second inscription, this time in Latin letters, above the Hebrew one, written in ink, somewhat faded, on the bases of the four columns which form part of the initial illustration of the scroll. It reads: "Anno/ Mundi/ 5212/ A.D. 1451/".¹ Instead of this date, however, both E. Namenyi² and C. Roth³ give 1453. Whatever the reasons for neither of them taking into account or even mentioning the first two indications of the date 1451 at the beginning of the *Megillah*, the date 1453 is to be found in the third inscription, this time at the end of the Scroll, in the scene showing Mordecai speaking to the Jews (Pl. III(a)).⁴ This reads:

נגמר בשושן בשנת ר"ג לפק ||

(Completed at Shushan in the year 213, according to the minor reckoning.) Thus the year is 5213 = 1453. This line was not written by the scribe responsible for the first inscription, supposedly giving the date, nor is the script similar to any of the numerous Hebrew inscriptions which occur in the illustrations; it has been added later.

We should mention that immediately beneath this inscription is another one reading:

ע"י ה"ק דוד בן כ' יעקב כץ ||

(By the hand of the unworthy David, son of the priest Jacob Katz(?)). These two very closely written lines are by different hands, and therefore David Katz (?) was not the writer of the line claiming that the *Megillah* was written at Susa in 1453. Indeed, could it possibly have been written there, even if one ignores the unlikely date? It is most improbable, as nothing in the script, even less in the illustrations, in any way suggest Persia. Wherever the writer may have lived when he wrote *Shushan*,⁵ he may have been thinking of his own town, by analogy with the town of

¹ See above, p. 180 n. 1 where the date is given in the letter of the Librarian of the Athenaeum.

² Loc. cit. "... is clearly dated 1453 ...".

³ Loc. cit. "The earliest dated specimen ... ostensibly of 1453 ...".

⁴ See above, p. 177.

⁵ See the Book of Esther i. 2; viii. 15; ix, 6, 11, 15, 18 and *passim* for this name.

Shushan in the Book of Esther. On the other hand, he may simply have intended a joke.

As for the date [5]213 (1452/53), he cannot have invented it, as it approximates to the date [5]212 which figures in the first inscription at the beginning of the scroll. We suggest that he made a mistake in his counting when he changed the word אורה (which, in his ignorance, he believed to be the right date) into a series of Hebrew letters with the same numerical value, and that he wrote ז"יג (213) instead of ז"יב (212), the mistake being confined to the last letter.

As for the first date, we must put aside the solution, proposed by other scholars, based only on the word אורה = 1451/2; this date cannot be taken into consideration here. It would also be useless to select some of the letters in the first two words of the verse quoted, ליהודים היתה, in order to obtain a total of about 420, which would correspond to the year 1660. Such a conjecture would not in any way resolve the problem, since we should thus merely be inventing the date we should like to find and which our examination of the illustrations has led us to expect. We must therefore conclude that none of the dates given in the three inscriptions can be of any help in determining the correct date of the Liverpool *Megillah*. The solution could be in the first Hebrew inscription, but its scribe has wilfully placed the misleading foliage over the word אורה, thus making it impossible to find it.

We therefore have divergences in the dates inscribed in the Liverpool *Megillah* as in the Rylands *Megillah*, where however they are fortunately less serious. Incidentally, these two scrolls are not the only illustrated *megilloth* known to us where such erroneous inscriptions occur.

We have limited our study to some of the most important hand-illustrated *megilloth* previous to the eighteenth century. Let us now sum up the principal points, iconographic and stylistic, which have emerged from our examination of the scrolls themselves.

In the first place, we have in the *megilloth* still extant an important aspect of Jewish manuscript illustration. The illustrated *megilloth* are indeed an integral part of Jewish art from the late Middle Ages to modern times.

We have been able to discover in the Kirschstein-Guggenheim, the Rylands and the Liverpool *Megilloth* three different approaches to the task of illustrating the Book of Esther, dating from three different periods. In the first, we are still in the Middle Ages ; the artist was venturing, probably for the first time, to give a pictorial version of the story of Esther. Was he obeying a tradition going back to the Dura Europos frescoes, or copying the few illustrations in medieval Hebrew Bibles, or had he turned to the story itself for his inspiration? From what we have seen, the first of these suggestions can be ruled out. Of course we cannot exclude the sources which the Jewish artist could find in Christian art ; yet some of the Hebrew Bibles containing Esther illustrations are almost as old as the Christian versions of the same subject. It seems most likely that he remained within his own circle, and, with a knowledge of the Hebrew Bible illustrations, began to build up an iconographic cycle which was to be used and developed throughout the following centuries, culminating in the extremely full version given in the Liverpool scroll.

In the Kirschstein-Guggenheim *Megillah* we also see how much the artist is still under the influence of older decorative patterns ; these occur side by side with pictorial illustrations which are fifty years or more in advance of them in manner and spirit. In the development of the illustration of the *megillah*, we notice a decrease in the quantity of purely decorative details in relation to the increase in the importance attached to the pictorial representation of the story itself. The artist of the Liverpool *Megillah* is no longer concerned with the pleasure to be derived from the mere drawing of decorative designs ; instead, he is searching for the means of conveying every minute detail which the reading of the text might suggest to him. He is so imbued with the text that he even enlarges upon it when the text does not develop certain episodes in sufficient detail. However, he does not often take such liberties, and on the whole we find in this scroll a scrupulous interpretation of the text.

With the Rylands *Megillah* we find ourselves midway between the medieval type of illustration and the "classical", of which the artist could not have imagined the future existence and

form. We find in it medieval elements, such as the griffins and the type of foliage in the lower border. On the other hand, the well-composed scenes, the presence of figures wearing contemporary costumes, as well as certain decorative elements, for instance the final cartouche, all betray the influence of the early seventeenth century, the period in which it was produced. There is no doubt that this particular *megillah*, with its charming scenes and its interesting documentary details, vividly shows the artist's concern to convey more than just a pictorial version of the text he was illustrating.

The three other less important *megilloth* discussed in this study, in which decoration occupies more space than pictorial representation, have been included in order to show the various possibilities open to the artist in the illustration of the *megillah*. In one of them, that in the Gustave Tuck Museum, we find a partial cycle of *megillah* illustrations, while the one at the Musée de Cluny even contains a biblical illustration. Nevertheless the paucity of illustrations in these three scrolls, together with the vast number of scrolls not illustrated at all, underline the extreme rarity, and hence the extreme importance to the historian of illuminated manuscripts, of the few fully-illustrated *megilloth* still extant.