The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation in Medieval Studies

of

Zsófia Buda

on

SACRIFICE AND REDEMPTION IN THE HAMBURG MISCELLANY. THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF A FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ASHKENAZI MANUSCRIPT

will be held on

Thursday, 17 May 2012, at 14:00

in the

Gellner Room – Monument Building
Central European University (CEU)
Nádor u. 9, Budapest

Examination Committee

Chair: András Kovács (Nationalism Studies Program, CEU)

Members: Gerhard Jaritz (Department of Medieval Studies, CEU)
Gábor Buzási (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest)
Zsuzsanna Urbach (Museum of Fine Arts)
Béla Zsolt Szakács (Department of Medieval Studies, CEU)
Carsten Wilke (Departments of History, Medieval Studies, and Nationalism Program, CEU)

External readers:
Hans-Wealter Stork (State and University Library Hamburg)
Sarit Shalev-Eyni (Hebrew University, Jerusalem)

The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection in the CEU-ELTE Medieval Library, Budapest, 6-8 Múzeum krt.
Nurtured from the same source and with a large number of their members living in the same society, Judaism and Christianity could never ignore each other. There was an ongoing dialogue between them which had a decisive impact on the development of both religions. Polemics were not confined to theology and to written works. They impacted other spheres of life as well. Art was no exception either. There is a long history of the study of the visual expression of attitudes towards Jews within Christian art. These studies focused on how Jews were imagined and depicted by Christians and how they appear in their works of art. In these studies, Jews were merely seen as objects of representations. In the last two decades, some scholars have also started to search for expressions about Christians in Jewish art, seeing it as a possible medium for the Jewish party to argue with the Christian side and/or to strengthen the Jewish side.

The illustration program of the Hamburg Miscellany—produced in the second quarter of the fifteenth century in the area of Mainz—contains numerous scenes which demand a martyrological and/or an eschatological interpretation. Due to the interdependent nature of such Jewish and Christian concepts, besides “articulating” special Jewish ideas, these miniatures are likely to contain criticism of Christian beliefs. On the other hand, its images often show the influence of Christian art in their
These features make the Miscellany an excellent candidate for an iconographical study focusing on the messages carried by its miniatures in relationship with Christian visual art and concepts.

Several individual studies have been written about certain miniatures of the Miscellany. They provided important contributions to the iconographical interpretation of these miniatures. Nonetheless, none of them placed the images they investigated within the context of the entire illustration program of the Miscellany, something indispensable for a full understanding of the iconographic significance of these miniatures, and no monograph has yet been devoted to the Miscellany. In my thesis, I provide a monographic research study of the Miscellany, investigating its iconographic particularities within the manuscript as a whole as well as in the wider context of fifteenth-century Ashkenaz.

Jewish manuscripts produced in medieval Christian Europe were inevitably influenced by the art of the majority and to a certain degree they used the same “visual vocabulary.” Therefore, instead of focusing only on the Jewish or Christian origin of certain motifs, it is more fruitful to study the integration of these elements within their present context, namely, how this visual vocabulary was used, according to what sort of “grammatical rules,” and in what structures. The painters may have provided the visual vocabulary, but the way they were constructed into meaningful units, that is, “sentences” was determined not exclusively by them but also by other parts of the authorship such as the scribe, the patron, or a Jewish advisor.
There are different degrees in the integration of a foreign element, that is, different levels of intercultural appropriation. A motif adopted from another culture can be placed into the new context untouched. It can be also modified, transformed in order to fit within its new context. The quintessence of integrating a Christian element into a Jewish context is the case where by transformation of the motif the message it carries is turned entirely upside down. That is, the authorship of these images used Christian visual “vocabulary” not only to construct special Jewish but at the same time anti-Christian “sentences.” At first glance, the illustration in the Hamburg Miscellany seems to have contained several images of martyrological scenes or scenes of divine redemption where elements borrowed from Christian iconography were used. In my study, I will examine the nature of Jewish appropriation of Christian iconographical motifs in the Hamburg Miscellany and show whether they became the bearers of special Jewish messages or not through their transformation.

In the first part of my dissertation, I will provide a detailed description of the manuscript both as a literary work and as a material object. The survey of its paleographical and codicological features will be followed by a compendium of its illustration program. The available data on its authorship and its provenance will be also discussed here. A detailed iconographical analysis of the miniatures will constitute the second part of the thesis. The images will be examined in comparison with other Jewish depictions as well as with Christian iconographical traditions. The analysis will not be limited to the possible polemical aspects of the miniatures, but will provide a comprehensive picture of the iconographical characteristics of the illustration program. In the third part, I will assess the results of the
iconographical analysis within the wider context of Jewish martyrological literature, on the one hand, and Jewish-Christian relations in fifteenth-century Ashkenaz, on the other hand.
Curriculum Vitae

Zsófia Buda

Education:

2009-2010 Visiting Student at Faculty of Humanities, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

2007-2008 Visiting Research Student, Rothberg International School, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

2005-ongoing PhD Candidate at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary. Department of Medieval Studies

2004-2005 MA studies at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary. Department of Medieval Studies

1998-2010 MA studies at Eötvös Lóránd University, Budapest, Hungary. Department of Hebrew Studies

1996-2003 MA studies at Eötvös Lóránd University, Budapest, Hungary. Department of Art History

Employment:

3 Jan 2012 - Library assistant, Muller Memorial Library, Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, Yarnton Manor, UK


2002-2004 Curator of the Judaica Collection, Hungarian Jewish Museum, Budapest
Scholarships and Awards:

Grants towards the academic year 2009/2010

Doctoral Scholarship for the academic year 2009/2010
Rothschild Foundation Europe
Received in July 2009

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Grants towards the academic year 2007/2008

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Travel grants

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Recent Publications (related to the topic of the doctoral thesis):


