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## SHORTER NOTICES

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## The conservation of the Sarajevo Haggadah



Fig. 1 Full-page illumination (fol. 3\*). ©State Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, photo by Andrea Pataki.

In 2001, the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo (UNMiBH), and the UNESCO Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina decided to undertake the conservation of the Sarajevo Haggadah, an important fourteenth-century illuminated parchment manuscript (Figs. 1, 2). A mission was organized in April 2001 with the aim of examining the manuscript and writing a proposal for its conservation. The working group consisted of chief librarian Jean-Marie Arnoult, art historian Bezalel Narkiss, and conservator Andrea Pataki.

As a first step, the manuscript was examined and its physical state described. In view of the history of the document and its symbolic value in the current political and religious context, our proposal for the manuscript focussed on preserving it and carrying out stabilizing repairs which would not alter its



Fig. 2 Half-page illumination (fol. 10\*). ©State Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, photo by Andrea Pataki.



Fig. 3 Locked metal box where the manuscript was stored in the vault of the National Bank, Sarajevo. ©State Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Fig. 4 Sarajevo Haggadah in its metal box. ©State Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

character. The final decision, accepted by UNMiBH, was to stabilize the nineteenth-century binding and repair the partly broken text-block.<sup>1</sup> This decision was influenced by the fact that the manuscript could not be moved from Sarajevo and it would therefore be necessary to carry out the conservation work on site. The manuscript was stored in a locked metal box in a vault at the Union Bank in Sarajevo, a branch of the National Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Figs. 3, 4). Due to its special status, access and study were strictly controlled. Only representatives of the State Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the National Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Union Bank were permitted to handle the manuscript.

### History of the Sarajevo Haggadah

The Sarajevo Haggadah is one of the most famous fourteenth-century Hebrew illuminated Spanish Haggadoth.<sup>2</sup> Fourteen other sumptuous Haggadoths exist, all written from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries for wealthy Jews in the Kingdom of Aragon, mainly in Barcelona. The Sarajevo Haggadah consists of three sections and begins with a consecutive biblical cycle, with full-page illustrations from the Creation to the Death of Moses (fols. 1–34). The next section gives the text of the home ritual of Passover Eve (fols. 1\*–50\*). The final section consists of liturgical poems and daily readings for the seven days of the Passover festival (fols. 53\*<sup>v</sup>–104\*<sup>v</sup>).

The manuscript was probably conceived and created in Barcelona, as the city arms appear at the top of fol. 3\* (Fig. 1). The heraldic crests of the Sanz and Ben Shoushan families appear at the bottom of fol. 3\* and in the panel on fol. 19\*<sup>v</sup>. This may indicate that the Haggadah was especially made for a marriage between these two well known and prosperous families.

With the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the manuscript was probably taken by its owners to Italy. It was sold in Italy on 25 August 1510 and was expurgated there by the censor Giovanni Domenico Vistorini in 1609.<sup>3</sup> It may have reached Sarajevo during the unification of Italy, in the second half of the nineteenth century, when many Jews fled to the Balkans in the Ottoman Empire. In 1894 the impoverished family which owned it at the time sold the Haggadah to the State Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The manuscript has survived several conflicts, including the First and Second World Wars and the Bosnian War of 1992–1995, during which the State Museum came under heavy fire and was partially destroyed. The Sarajevo Haggadah, however, was rescued and kept safe. Having survived many political conflicts, the manuscript has come to symbolize hope and reconciliation between religious communities, especially since the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Today, the Sarajevo Haggadah is considered to be an outstanding art historical treasure, as it is the oldest Sephardic Haggadah. Only a small number of comparable manuscripts has survived. The exclusive sequence of 34 full-page illuminations of Genesis is unique in its extremely high quality of execution and pristine condition. The subsequent liturgical sections contain colourful decoration and enhance the value of this manuscript.

### Brief description and condition

The text-block of the manuscript measured 228 x 162 x 37mm (h x w x d). The text-block consisted of 141 parchment folios with paper endleaves and one detached leaf of handmade paper (with chain lines), presumably from an earlier endleaf construction/binding. The manuscript had a double foliation: one for the miniatures (fols. 1–34), and another for the Haggadah and the liturgical section (fols. 1\*–104\*). Folios 105\* to 107\* were blank and not numbered; fols. 50\*<sup>v</sup> to 53\* were also blank. The double foliation of the manuscript was completed after the manuscript was acquired by the State Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, since it appears in the introductory volume of the first facsimile of the Haggadah produced in 1898.<sup>5</sup> The manuscript had been heavily cropped and was bound in a half-leather binding, probably dating from the nineteenth century.

The manuscript had been written by one scribe in scripts of different size. Ruling by stylus could be seen on some folios of all three sections, and always on

<sup>1</sup> Pataki, A. *ET AL*, unpublished mission report to United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> The Haggadah contains the order of the Passover seder. Haggadah means 'telling' and is a fulfillment of the scriptural commandment to each Jew to 'tell your son' about the Jewish liberation from slavery in Egypt, as described in the book of Exodus in the Torah. Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haggadah>, accessed 4 Aug 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Per manuscript note by Vistorini himself, on folio 104<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Press release, 'UN Initiative enables display of precious 14th century artifact', November 2002, [www.unmibh.org](http://www.unmibh.org).

the flesh side. Some of the borders of the full-page miniatures had been ruled. No pricking was observed.

As mentioned above, the manuscript was highly decorated with 34 full-page miniatures of biblical scenes, with illumination on the flesh side only, and the hair sides left blank. Two Spanish artists executed the full-page miniatures, one in an Italianate style and the other in a French style. The illumination was similar to the Italian-Spanish Gothic style of the 1343 *CHRONICLE OF KING JAMES II OF ARAGON* (Barcelona, University Library).<sup>6</sup> A large variety of colours was used in the illumination, including red, vermilion, blue lapis lazuli, green, ochre, yellow and lead white, and gold leaf applied on a thin layer of pink gesso mixed with size.

Due to the use of the manuscript on the Passover table for many generations, the main damage to the text-block had been caused by liquid. The ritual of washing the hands twice during the ceremony had resulted in water stains on the parchment and smudges and smearing of pigments. The ceremony also calls for the drinking of four cups of wine and consumption of different foods dipped in salt water, before and during the festive meal. This activity resulted in many stains and discoloured areas on the pages which call for ritual drinking and eating. Apart from these specific leaves the manuscript was in overall good condition despite this damage.

The binding of the Sarajevo Haggadah measured 240 x 166 x 40mm (h x w x d). The tight-back half-leather binding with marbled paper sides appeared to date to the nineteenth century. The text-block had been re-sewn on four single raised cords. Evidence of an earlier sewing could be seen where the early quires were separating from the text-block.

### Conservation treatment

From 13–22 December 2001, the conservation work was undertaken by Andrea Pataki. The project needed to be completed within a challenging nine-day schedule. For safety reasons, the manuscript could not be moved and was to be treated in the Union Bank in Sarajevo. This tight timetable and restrictions required a great deal of advance planning. In addition, the treatment was required to be observed by representatives of the State Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, by the local police department, and a representative of the security department of the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The presence of a number of non-conservators in proximity to the manuscript called for the establishment of some strict rules, such as no smoking or eating. All conservation tools and materials had to be transported by the conservator to the new 'conservation lab' and unexpected situations requiring different tools or materials had to be anticipated in advance. In addition, a laptop, office supplies, and other materials were needed. The kit weighed around 40kg and needed to be cleared in advance with the airline, to avoid any difficulties when checking in.

After documenting the manuscript, a schedule was drawn up for the different treatment steps to use as a guideline during the nine days. Given the intense public interest in the conservation treatment, some time slots were factored in for interviews and visits. Each day, the manuscript was brought to the 'conservation lab' in its metal box which was opened by representatives of the Museum. Working hours were from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, after which the manuscript was locked in its box and promptly returned to the vault of the Union Bank. As a consequence, it was necessary to stop treatment each day at a stage at which the manuscript could be closed and put away safely. This meant making sure that all repairs would have adequate time to dry during the day, which required a great deal of planning and foresight.

In addition to stabilizing treatment for the manuscript, a second important aim was to train and raise awareness amongst the museum staff in how to handle safely such a precious object. Museum staff were instructed in how to put the manuscript on its display cradle and secure it safely, as well as how to ensure that scholars and visitors could consult the manuscript safely. Whilst these periods of instruction took time away from the conservation of the manuscript, they were considered to be essential.

5 Muller, H. and J. von Schlosser, *DIE HAGGADAH VON SARAJEVO* (Vienna: Textband, 1898) 33–92.

6 Narkiss, B., *HEBREW ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS* (Jerusalem; New York: MacMillan, 1969), 16, 22, 26, 27, 60, plate 10.



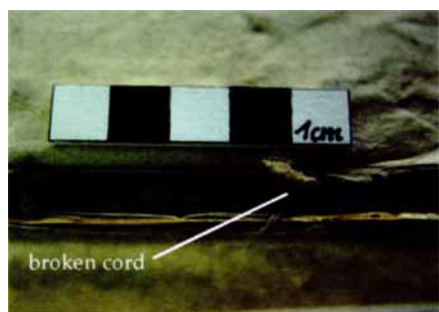


Fig. 5 The broken fourth cord (right).



Fig. 6 *In situ* resewing with new linen thread.

<sup>7</sup> In a Hebrew binding which opens from the right as the book as in the hand, the 'upper board' is on the left.

The main aim of treatment was to secure the first 10 quires which were becoming detached from the rest of the text-block. At some time in the recent past, the first three quires had been re sewn with a cotton thread. The upper inner joint had broken and the leather spine along with some paper lining on the spine had become completely detached allowing access to the spine and sewing supports. The first ten quires were detached and the distorted outer bifolio of the first quire was humidified locally in the spinefold area and dried under weight so that it could be re sewn to the text-block.

Three of the four sewing cords were intact, with the fourth cord broken at the upper (left) board (Fig. 5).<sup>7</sup> This fourth cord was repaired by fitting a new linen cord underneath the broken area and twisting it around the existing cord. The ten quires were re sewn *in situ* with new linen thread (Fig. 6). After re sewing the first half of the textblock, the new slip of the fourth cord was frayed out and adhered to outer face of the upper (left) board.

Minor repairs were carried out to the paper endleaves and the upper inner joint. The leather head and tail caps were repaired with new calf leather toned with 1, 2 azo-metalcomplex dyes.

### Conclusion

Through planning in advance and working to a well-defined schedule, the actual conservation treatment of the Sarajevo Haggadah was carried out in just six days at the Union Bank in Sarajevo. In December 2002, the manuscript was exhibited in the newly prepared exhibition room of the State Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo, surrounded by other treasures of the collection. Today, the Sarajevo Haggadah manuscript is stored in the State Museum in a custom-made drop-spine box. It is now in stable condition after conservation treatment and can be exhibited and seen by all the citizens of, and visitors to, the city of Sarajevo.

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