**Elijah the Prophet: Guard Dog of Israel**

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The biblical prophet Elijah, famous in Jewish tradition as the herald of the Messiah at the eschaton and "guest of honor" at every Jewish circumcision ceremony and at the annual Passover eve meal. The rituals of Passover are embedded with redemptive and eschatological symbolism, and the Egyptian exodus was understood as prototypical of the final redemption. Elijah's inclusion in the Passover Seder ceremony was introduced in Ashkenaz during the high Middle Ages until he seems to have eclipsed the Messiah himself as the guest of honor. Elijah's figure symbolized the hopes that Ashkenazi Jews expressed during Passover. More specifically, the inclusion of Elijah in the Seder ritual is bound to his role as the 'Guard Dog of Israel'.

During the 14th and 15th centuries, illuminations of redemption scenes in Passover Haggadot usually accompanied the paragraph of Shefoth Hamatkhah—"Pour Your fury on the nations that have not known You", a selection of verses from scripture petitioning God to exact vengeance on the Gentiles who persecute the Jews. This is a fine example of the characteristically Ashkenazi eschatological narrative. Several Haggadot include a dog in the illustration bellow this paragraph, which functions as a metonymic symbol for Elijah.

Jews developed their unique iconographic usage of dogs in their artwork while aware of the duality in which Christians treated the canine image. As a medieval western Christian theological symbol, the dog served a positive purpose inwardly, while at the same time filling a negative role outwardly. In the Jewish iconography the loyal dog of the noble hunter became the bloodhound of Beau, representing Christendom, chasing the dog, representing Israel. The Dominican friars are depicted as Pharaoh's lap dogs. Thus, the Jews inverted the 'Good Dogs' of the Christians into their own 'Bad Dogs'. Furthermore, they turned the Christian 'Bad Dog' into their own 'Good Dog'. The attributes of the Jewish Dog' became positive, highlighting the Jews' loyalty to God and steadfastness in their "defiling" status. Elijah served medieval Ashkenazi Jews as a model for the Jewish Domini Canem, the Lord's Dog, the Lord's loyal messenger and protector of versus Israel. As such, Elijah was an equal match for the Evil Dog (and Son) of Eden, owing to his characteristics, his designated role in the redemption and even in the numerical value of his name.

By embodying the role of the 'Guard Dog of Israel', Elijah is not confined to waiting until the end of days to rescue Jews and avenge their suffering. Amplifying Elijah's role in the Passover Seder ritual, even at the expense of the Messiah, expresses the desire that Elijah will appear (albeit in disguise) and stand up to the dogs barking at the Jews now, in specific and local situations. At a time while they were impatiently waiting for the Messiah to arrive and turn the temporal power structures around, medieval Ashkenazi Jewry needed to know that God had not forsaken them, and was indeed continuously watching over them. It was Elijah, the 'Guard Dog', who was best suited for this much-needed role.