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THE Posen Library

OF JEWISH CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

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Dear colleagues and friends of The Posen Library,

Our current pandemic of COVID-19 and the imminent arrival of Passover, “the season of our freedom,” prompts reflection on the many interpretations of the holiday in [The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization](#). Most notably, both the soon-to-be-published Volume 8: *Crisis and Creativity between World Wars, 1918–1939*, edited by Todd M. Endelman and Zvi Gitelman, and the recently published [Volume 6: *Confronting Modernity, 1750–1880*](#), edited by Elisheva Carlebach, feature creative artistic responses to Passover on their covers.

While the festival inspired both artists, each chose to emphasize very different elements.

Charlotte von Rothschild, whose painting of Miriam leading the women in song and dance by the shores of the Reed Sea graces the cover of Volume 6, lovingly illustrated a Haggadah as a gift for her uncle, Amschel Mayer Rothschild. Born into a prominent Jewish banking family, she grew up in London and studied art as a young woman, taking advantage of one of the opportunities that opened in the modern era.

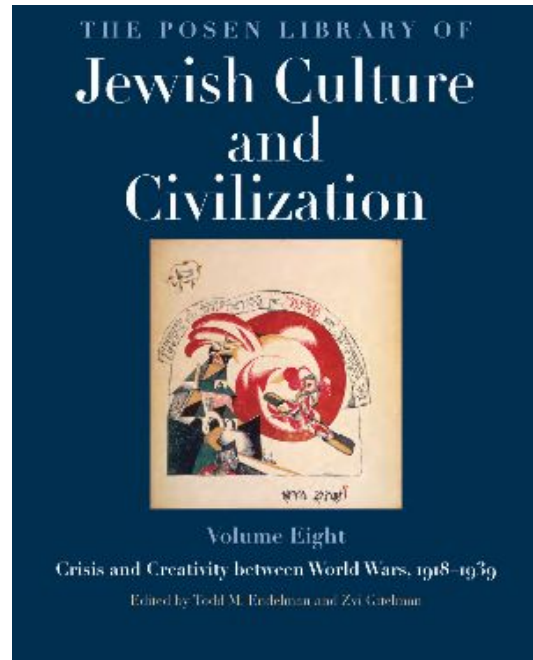


The Haggadah, completed in 1842, contains eighteen text illustrations in addition to decorated initials. While it is remarkable for its conflation of Jewish and Christian motifs, it is perhaps more remarkable as the only known Hebrew manuscript from this era to have been illuminated by a woman. I suspect it is no accident that Charlotte von Rothschild chose to paint Miriam, dancing out in front of Moses, who can be glimpsed in the rear on the left. (To see the beautiful cover of von Rothschild's Haggadah, [Passover Haggadah with German Translation](#), just sign in, or register for free on the PDL.)

Folio 37 from *Passover Haggadah with German Translation* (1842) by Charlotte von Rothschild (1807–1859). Braginsky Collection No. 314, folio 37. Braginsky Collection, Zurich. Photography by Ardon Bar-Hama, Ra'anana, Israel.

Jump to the 20th century and the avant-garde artist El Lissitzky, who illustrated the popular song “Had Gadya” (One Little Goat), which is sung as part of the Passover Seder service’s concluding section.

Todd and Zvi chose Lissitzky's lithograph accompanying the verse, "The Fire Came and Burnt the Stick," because it represented a radically new understanding of what Jewish art in the Soviet Union might become. At the same time, Lissitzky's modernist picture of the brilliant red fire burning the stick—that beat the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid that my father bought for two *zuzim*—foreshadowed the conflagration that would consume European Jewry at the end of the era covered in their volume.



Hope and trepidation coexisted, effectively portraying “crisis and creativity.” Although Lissitzky subsequently shifted his artistic focus away from the idea of creating a Jewish national style, his experiments blending texts and images illuminate a moment of Jewish possibilities after the Bolshevik Revolution.

These expressions of Jewish culture represent only two examples of how Passover gets interpreted by Jews across countries and eras. Once you have registered for free on the [Posen Digital Library \(PDL\)](#), you can discover other examples, such as “[A Union Soldier's Passover](#),” a funny account of an Ohio soldier celebrating the holiday in the wilds of West Virginia in 1862.

The publication of Volume 8 of The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization represents a collaboration of excellent scholars—Hillel Kieval, Mikhail Krutikov, Alan Mintz, Anita Norich, Derek Penslar, Benjamin Pollock, Mark Slobin, and Stephen Whitfield—with the editors.

It is with great sadness that I note that Alan Mintz, ז"ל, one of the advisors for Volume 8 of The Posen Library did not live to see its publication.

Wishing everyone renewed inspiration in the upcoming “season of our freedom,”

Deborah Dash Moore

Editor in Chief

The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization

P.S. To receive bimonthly emails from Deborah Dash Moore, send your email address to info@posenlibrary.com.

