

## Worksheet for the Study of a Historical Source

### Shavuot Prayers, Rome Machzor, 1450



In this activity, you will be working with a historical resource which suggests how Shavuot was celebrated in the Roman Jewish community in the 1400s. The Jewish community in Rome is the oldest Jewish community known in Europe and has many of its own customs. With this historical source, we will step back in time to the world of the Roman Jewish community in the distant past.

Look at the historical source, "Shavuot Prayers, Rome Machzor, 1450," and answer the questions below.

#### First Impressions

1. Describe your first impressions of the historical source. What attracted your attention?

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## Paying Attention to the Details

2. Describe in detail what you see in the source. (For example: type of writing, size of the script, illustrations, language used, type of paper, colors, condition of the source, etc.)

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3. According to the title of the historical source, this document is “the *machzor* for the Roman tradition for the whole year.” What type of document is it?

\_\_\_ Diary \_\_\_ Prayer Book \_\_\_\_\_ Novel \_\_\_\_\_ Encyclopedia \_\_\_ Other

What details in the document prove your choice?

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When is it customary to use a *machzor*?

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Do you think every person in the community had an illustrated *machzor* like this one? Explain your answer.

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## Understanding the Meaning

4. The historical source deals with Shavuot. Give two other names for Shavuot.

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5. What event is illustrated on the page?

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What is the connection between the event and Shavuot?

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6. Open a *Tanach (Bible)* to Exodus 19 or find it in [Sefaria](#). What details described in the text can be identified in the illustration?

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7. Read the following Midrash:

אמר רבי אבהו בשם רבי יוחנן, כשנתן הקדוש ברוך הוא את התורה, צפור לא צוח, עוף לא פרח, שור לא נעה, אופנים לא עפו, שרפים לא אמרו קדוש קדוש, הים לא נדעע, הבריות לא דברו, אלא העולם שותק ומחריש, ויצא הקול: אנכי ה' אלקיך.

Said Rabbi Abahu in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, When the Holy Blessed One gave the Torah, no bird chirped, no fowl fluttered, no ox lowed, the angels did not fly, the Seraphim did not utter "Kadosh, Kadosh" (Holy, Holy), the sea did not roar, the creatures did not speak; the universe was silent and mute. And the voice came forth "Anochi Adonai Elohecha" (I am the Lord, your God).

How did the artist incorporate the midrash into his illustration?

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8. Notice the clothes worn by the characters. According to their dress, who do you think the characters portrayed in this illustration are and what time period do they represent? Explain your answer.

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Why do you think the artist chose to draw the characters in that particular way?

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9. What can be learned about the Jewish community of Rome from this historical source (from religious, economic, and cultural perspectives)?

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## Thinking and Evaluating

10. Imagine how Jews in the Roman community felt when they prayed using this *machzor*. How do you think the illustrations affected their feelings about the prayers?

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11. Do you think we should we add illustrations to prayer books? Explain your answer.

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## Creating

12. If you were illustrating a *machzor* for Shavuot, what aspects of the festival would you choose to illustrate? Explain your answer.

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13. Choose a text read on Shavuot or about the festival. Consider its message and the feelings that you would like the person reading it to experience. Draw an illustration to accompany the text. (Suggested texts: Shemot 19, Book of Ruth, descriptions of bringing *bikkurim* to the Temple as described in Mishnah Bikkurim 3.)