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,” (you can enlarge it via the + in the viewer tools) and answer the questions below.

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

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.)
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

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

4. What details in the document prove your choice?
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

5. When is it customary to use a machzor?
   ________________________________________________________________

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

How did it go? Let us know! learning@nli.org.il
Understanding the Meaning

7. The historical source deals with Shavuot. Give two other names for Shavuot.______________________________________   __________________________________

8. What event is illustrated on the page?________________________________________________________________

9. What is the connection between the event and Shavuot?__________________________________ ____________________________________________________________

10. Open a Tanach (Bible) to Exodus 19 or find it in Sefaria. What details described in the text can be identified in the illustration?__________________________________ ____________________________________________________________

11. Read the following Midrash:
   אמר רב בִּי אַבָּהוּ בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן, כְּשֶׁנָּתַן הַקָּדֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת הַתּוֹרָה, צִּפּוֹר לֹא צָוַח, עוֹף לֹא פָּרַח, שוֹר לֹא גָעָה, אוֹפַנִּים לֹא עָפוּ, שְּרָפִּים לֹא אָמְּרוּ קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ, הַיָּם לֹא נִזְּדַעֲזָע, הַבְּרִּיוֹת לֹא דִּבְּרוּ, אֶלָּא הָעוֹלָם שׁוֹתֵּק וּמַחֲרִיש, וְיָצָא הַקָוֵל: אָנֹכִי אַדְּוָּן אֱלֹהיךָ.
   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).

12. How did the artist incorporate the midrash into his illustration?____________________________________________________________________________________

13. 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.______________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________

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

How did it go? Let us know! learning@nli.org.il
15. What can be learned about the Jewish community of Rome from this historical source (from religious, economic, and cultural perspectives)?

____________________________________________________________________________________

Thinking and Evaluating

16. 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?

____________________________________________________________________________________

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

____________________________________________________________________________________

Creating

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

____________________________________________________________________________________

19. 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.)

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