The humble castanet has not been mentioned much in these recondite pages, with only half a dozen references in more than 2,000 Comms. This brief Communication reproduces three pictures which we have come across in a search of the internet for musical instruments in images of the dances of Salome, and of Miriam; our broader findings are shortly to appear in the Lute Society’s Lutezine quarterly PDF colour supplement. Three images, not directly copies of one another, is probably enough evidence to suggest that the instruments represented are ‘an actual thing’, to use contemporary parlance.

The occasion for the Dance of Miriam was the rejoicing at the destruction of Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea as Moses led his people out of Egypt.

So Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand: and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

The three images showing castanets – assuming that is what they are – all come from 14th century Jewish Spain, from Haggadah manuscripts, setting out the order of the Passover Seder, and recounting the story of the Exodus from Egypt; their narrative element made them a natural object for manuscript illumination.

The earliest and simplest is the BL Oriental MS 2737, f.86v, the Hispano-Moresque Haggadah, from Castile, c.1300. It shows Miriam(?) with a painted round tambour, a woman with long ‘Turkish’-style castanets, and a third woman - perhaps clicking her fingers, corresponding to jaleo in modern flamenco? Or is she supposed to be playing (invisible!) round castanets of the more familiar variety?

The other two images both come from mid-14th century Barcelona. BL Oriental MS 2884, the Sister Haggadah, shows the dancers doing a rather interesting and complex dance, involving some sort of interweaving ‘hay’ or ‘farandole’ figure, rather than solo ‘freestyle’ dancing, to the music of a square frame drum, and with the long castanets played by the third woman from the left.

The beautiful and luxurious Golden Haggadah, BL Add. MS 27210 is lavish both in execution and in the instrumentation it depicts: a lute or gittern, a tambourine (which seems to have slits in its sides for the metal jingles), a painted square frame drum, horizontal cymbals, and held by a lady behind the square frame drummer we can just see castanets, this time in a pair played in one hand, with the join of the two blocks clearly visible. (Dancing to the lute in the late Middle Ages is something above all seen in sources from Italy and the Crown of Aragon, which ruled southern Italy; and there may be a Jewish connection; Joachim Lüdtke and Andreas Schlegel speculate in The Lute in Europe 2 (pp. 194–8) that Sephardic traders and merchants may have had a role in disseminating lute culture.)
BL Oriental MS 2737, f.86v, the Hispano-Moresque Haggadah, from Castile, c.1300.
BL Oriental MS 2884, the Sister Haggadah, mid-14th century Barcelona
Golden Haggadah. BL Add. MS 27210, mid-14th century Barcelona.

The Sephardic Jewish community forms a bridge between Europe and the Levant or ‘Orient’. It is interesting to see that in Christian iconography of the same subject, we see the square frame drum, but not the castanets.
Illustrating the text of the Vulgate, quoted above, here is an image from Amiens, Bibliothèque Municipale 108, f. 49v, from 1197.

And in Limoges MS B.M. 0002 f.182v, a gradual for Notredame de Fontevrault, from 1250-60, again we have the square frame drum only.
Praetorius, in his *Syntagma Musicum* plate XXX, shows a square hand-drum which he describes as ‘Moscowitsche’, and does illustrate the horizontal cymbals, but even among the rude or ancient instruments in the final plates of his famous collection, does not have anything quite like the castanets shown here. Incidentally, Praetorius (cribbing extensively from Virdung) seems to get hopelessly muddled on the meaning of ‘tympanum’ taking it to be a wind instrument; (volume II, (1619) p. 77, ‘Tympanum Hieronymi’, translated by David Z. Crookes in his commentary:

The tympanum was used a great deal in the praise of Almighty God, and is mentioned frequently in Holy Scripture. I find it depicted as a long pipe with a mouthpiece at the top, into which the player blows, and two holes at the lower end through which the sound and the wind escape. It was made of such a size that a woman could carry it in one hand. Nowadays, however, ‘tympanum’ refers to the large military drums . . .

Needless to say, no manuscript or other illustrations of Miriam show her playing a wind instrument.

In the admirably broad-minded and ethnographically curious *Gabinetto Harmonico* (1723) of Filippo Bonanni we do, however, find a later image of the wooden clappers of the Golden Haggadah; he calls them ‘Gnacchare delli Turchi’ (Turkish castanets) apparently drawing on the earlier writings of Ottavio Ferrari.

Finally, the Wikipedia entry for castanets has a Turkish image of c.1720, of a troupe of dancers, celebrating the circumcision of Sultan Ahmed’s son, clearly playing the same kind of castanets and dancing in the same way as in our Sephardic images.
There is clearly a place for the square-frame hand drum in early mediaeval music performances, including those of ‘Christian’ music, and these can still be bought – I got mine in the casbah in Marrakesh. But does anyone make, or know where you buy ‘Turkish castanets’ for the early Jewish – or Convivencia – repertoires?