

FUND OG FORSKNING



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*With summaries*

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Fig. 1: Moses to the right  
Aron to the left  
and Kopenhagen in Hebrew capital letters.  
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## AN ARTIST IN THE MAKING

Yehuda Leib ben Eliyya Ha-Cohen's *Haggadah*,  
Copenhagen, 1769<sup>1</sup>

AF

ULF G. HAXEN

### *Introduction*

The revival – or renaissance – of Jewish book painting in the 17th and 18th centuries has been thoroughly documented and researched in the past decades.<sup>2</sup> And focus has, for artistic reasons, been on the Bohemia-Moravian school of book painting and its ramification into Central and Northern Europe.

Scribes and book painters of the Bohemia-Moravian pictorial tradition crisscrossed Central and Northern Europe with their art from Nikolsburg in Moravia to Vienna, and from Vienna to Darmstadt, Bonn and Amsterdam, coming to the 'three communities' Hamburg, Altona, Wandsbeck and eventually reaching the Danish capital city, Copenhagen. Among the most prominent artists are Samuel of Dressnitz, Aron Wolf

<sup>1</sup> *The Haggadah* is an illustrated narrative of the dramatic rescue of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage based upon the Biblical book, *Exodus* 13:8 seq. The story is read aloud during the festive meal of the long Passover evening (Pesach) in the bosom of the family. And the youngest member of the family opens the proceedings with the question *ma nishtana ha laila ha-zeh*, 'why is this evening different from other evenings'. Whereupon the senior member of the family unfolds the drama of the *Exodus*.

<sup>2</sup> 'Revival' is to be taken literally. Written and illuminated Haggadah *codexi* were produced in Spain, Italy, France and Germany throughout medieval times. With the invention of book printing in the 15th century, the Haggadah was printed and illustrated with woodblock prints and etchings in Prague, Venice, Mantua, and Holland. All of which served as prototypes for the scribes and illuminators of the 18th century's illustrated Haggadot.

Gewitsch, Joseph ben David Leipnik<sup>3</sup> and Uri Feibush ben Isaac Segal, to mention a few of the most distinguished scribes and miniaturists of the Moravian school. The last in the row, Uri Feibush Segal, wrote and illuminated the outstanding folio-sized *codex of The Copenhagen Haggadah*, generally known as *The Wildmen Haggadah*, Altona, 1739, which marked an exceptionally accomplished stage in his production.<sup>4</sup>

Uri Feibush Segal's younger contemporary – and the key figure of this presentation – Yehuda Leib Ha-Cohen, was likewise an accomplished scribe (Hebrew, *sofer*) and illuminator (Hebrew, *tsajjar*) in his own right.

He migrated from Eastern Europe to the Danish kingdom towards the second half of the 18th century. His miniature style broke decisively with his predecessors' naïve approach to Haggadah iconography, contravening the aesthetics of the Bohemia-Moravian artistic features with a new, but short-lived brand in Jewish miniature style, which, for want of a better term, may be categorized as *eclecticism*.<sup>5</sup>

Yehuda Leib Ha-Cohen presumably left his hometown Leczno (Lissa) in Great Poland after a devastating conflagration of the Jewish quarter of his hometown in the year 1767. The dates of his birth and his demise are, however, unknown. From the dating in the colophon of his Haggadah it is, however, certified, that he was in Copenhagen prior to 1769, the year he completed what may be his major work, and that he sojourned in Copenhagen for at least 10 years.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Joseph ben David Leipnik and Uri Feibush were two prominent artists of 18th century Bohemia-Moravian miniature “folk art”, defined in *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Art Terms* (2001) as, ‘art and handicrafts produced by people who have had no formal art training except a tradition of styles and craftsmanship of a country or a region’.

<sup>4</sup> *The Copenhagen Haggadah* (1739) by Uri Feibush belongs to the Jewish Community in Copenhagen and is in the custody of the Royal Library, Copenhagen. A *facsimile* of this *codex* with an introduction by Chaja Benjamin was produced in Jerusalem, 1983. Cf. Fishof (1999), 235-39.

<sup>5</sup> Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, Darmstadt. Cod.Or.7. In the year 1860 the Chief Rabbi of Copenhagen, Abraham Alexander Wolff, donated the richly illustrated Haggadah to the township of Darmstadt, where his father had served as a rabbi, as a token of gratitude.

<sup>6</sup> Another extant work from Yehuda Leib's hand, an octavo-sized *Haggadah*, Copenhagen 1779, in a less spectacular setting was announced in *Judaica: Books, Manuscripts and Works of Art*, Sotheby, New York, 1986, p. 167.



*Codicology & Prototypes*

Our *Haggadah* is a folio-sized *codex* comprising 52 pages of which 14, including the title page, appear as framed miniature panels. A number of unframed vignettes, decorative patterns, folded ribbons and initials are, however, executed in the Bohemia-Moravian manner.

The typography and specific letters of Yehuda Leib's *Haggadah* are slightly different from the typography of the printed Amsterdam paradigms.<sup>7</sup> But his illustrations differ considerably from the pictorial sequence of the Bohemia-Moravian forerunners in his choice of haggadic motifs, and in iconography as well as in the liturgy of the *Seder*<sup>8</sup> narrative.

Our artist introduces himself in the colophon as a scribe (*sofer*) and illustrator (*tsayyar*)<sup>9</sup> of the *Haggadah*, adding an enigmatic phrase: [That this *Haggadah*] 'was done by common consent with the builders' (Fig.1). However, he omits the usual references as to whether he employs the script of the Amsterdam *Haggadah* prototypes and whether the *Seder* ritual follows the practice of the *Ashkenas* or that of the *Sefardic* community.<sup>10</sup>

Yehuda Leib's premise for choice and change of motifs and iconography and his possible source of inspiration from European currents of art, caused art historian Erik Toepflitz to suggest influences from genre etchings by Daniel Chodowiecki (1726-1801)<sup>11</sup> and drawings by Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) – or their apprentices.

He may even have studied and emulated other art techniques from etchings, prints and drawings, which he came across on journeys to art

<sup>7</sup> Yehuda Leib's handwriting deviates slightly from the standard *Ashkenas* square script.

<sup>8</sup> *Seder* meaning "Order", i.e. the progression of the Passover ceremony lasting for several hours the first evening of the feast.

<sup>9</sup> The frontispieces of the illuminated 18th century *Haggadah* manuscripts were usually copied from woodcut and copper engravings of the printed 15th century Hebrew books (*incunabula*).

<sup>10</sup> (Hebr. *lefi minhag ashkenas*) or (Hebr. *lefi minhag sefarad*) according to the *Eastern* and *Western* European ritus, respectively. Both the Venice *Haggadah* and the Amsterdam *Haggadah* were popular among the Sephardic Jewish communities. The passage, *lefi 'inyan ha-bana'im* ('according to (or in agreement with) the builders' (Hebr. הבנאים), may refer to the patronage of a 'Hofjude' indicating that the book was commissioned by either a Jewish or a Christian member of the Freemasons in Copenhagen.

<sup>11</sup> Chodowiecki was a prolific etcher of Berlin 'Spiessbürger' genre scenes in the Rococo century.

centres in European metropolises. Or, more likely, he was influenced by Danish painters of portraits and French, German, Dutch and Swedish painters and sculptors, who were active as teachers at the Copenhagen Academy of Arts inaugurated by the enlightened Danish monarch Frederik 5th in the year 1754.

Yehuda Leib eventually adapted these influences and interpreted them according to his personal taste and artistic purpose. However, it goes without saying that the biblical book of *Exodus per se* was his main point of departure and in keeping with the prototype motifs in Abraham ben Ya'acov's etchings in the two printed *Amsterdam Haggadot* (1695 and 1712).<sup>12</sup> Yehuda Leib Ha-Cohen – as well as his predecessor Uri Feibush Segal – relied iconographically on these Amsterdam prototypes. The two artists differed fundamentally in their artistic and aesthetic perception and the interpretation of Abraham ben Ya'acov's copperplate etchings. Uri Feibush emulated the naïve Moravian miniature tradition in his images, whereas Yehuda Leib turned the Amsterdam prototypes into genuine genre miniatures.

The sequences of the following Haggadah miniatures by Yehudah Leib prove to show a remarkable artistic and expressive performance by our scribe and illuminator. He remains faithful throughout to the folkloristic tradition of old<sup>13</sup>, but, simultaneously, he renews the tradition in form and content with the craftsman's skill, artistic sensitivity and technical proficiency in the interpretation of the biblical as well as extra-biblical themes – reaching a climax in his independent performances of *tableaux d'art* in their own right.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The Moravian folkloristic school based their motifs on the printed Amsterdam Haggadah's etchings and engravings by Abraham ben Ya'acov, who relied on Matthäus Merian's *Icones Biblicae* (1625). Ref., Wischnitzer (1931) and Namyeni (1957).

<sup>13</sup> The textual sources of the Haggadah were built upon various medieval Jewish interpretations and commentaries.

<sup>14</sup> To distinguish the Haggadah of Yehudah Leib (Copenhagen, 1769) from the Haggadah of Uri Feibush (Altona, 1739), we retain the name of the latter as *The Copenhagen Haggadah* (Altona 1739). Yehuda Leib's Haggadah (Copenhagen, 1769) was rightfully named *The Danish Haggadah* in the review by chief editor Herbert Pundik, *Politiken Daily* (April 14th, 1990). The *facsimile* edition of Yehuda Leib's Haggadah, *Codices Selecti*, Vol. LXXXIX with *Commentarium*, was published by *Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt*, (Graz, 1989).



Fig. 2: The bondage in Egypt. www.facsimiles.com

### *The Biblical Themes*

Six of Yehuda Leib's biblical miniatures are to all intents and purposes emulated from the printed prototypes of the Latin edition of *Icones Biblicae* and from the etchings of the printed Hebrew *Amsterdam Haggadot*,<sup>15</sup> the iconographical and stylistic elements of which Yehuda Leib rearranged according to his personal sensitivity and stylistic mode performed in delicate almost pastel-like watercolour.

The progression of the miniatures follows *grosso modo* the two printed Amsterdam versions<sup>16</sup> and opens with his depiction of the motif of Israelites building the two Egyptian storehouse towns *Pithom and Ramses*<sup>17</sup> under the constraint of Egyptian soldiers (Folio 7r; Fig. 2), and even

<sup>15</sup> (Haggadot: plural of Haggadah). Both Uri Feibush and Yehuda Leib relied iconographically and thematically on the Amsterdam prototypes of 1695 and 1712.

<sup>16</sup> The influence from *Icones Biblicae* (1630) are reflected in at least four etchings in Kraus, *Bilder Bibel* (1705).

<sup>17</sup> *Exodus* 1:11. Two Egyptian 'storage cities' Pithom and Ramses built by Israelite slaves. The motif was copied directly from the *Icones Biblicae* and the Amsterdam Haggadot prototypes.



Fig. 3: Moses is found on the Nile. [www.facsimiles.com](http://www.facsimiles.com)

more so in the depiction of the *Finding of the Infant Moses*.<sup>18</sup> The latter miniature displays a romantic scenery by the riverside (Folio 8r; Fig.3). The pharaonic princess, dressed all in white, gazes admiringly at the boy, while her ladies-in-waiting coo over the naked boy on the maid's lap. They all wear semi-contemporary *rococo* gowns and seem to be chatting in a pleasant atmosphere of delight, while the whole scene and the surrounding nature breathe impressions of romanticism.

In the subsequent thematic motif Yehuda Leib changes style, coming close to neoclassicism in his biblical image of *Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh* (Folio 9), which shows Moses turning the rod into a snake.<sup>19</sup> The motif is based on the representations in Mathäus Merian's *Icones* and in the etchings by Abraham bar Ya'acov in the two editions of the printed versions of the Amsterdam Haggadot.

Yehuda Leib reproduces this significant biblical motif in a characteristic measured and restrained neoclassical version, suggesting influences from mythological and historical motifs by Nicolas Poussin

<sup>18</sup> *Exodus* 2:5-2:10.

<sup>19</sup> *Exodus* 7:8-7:13.



Fig. 4: The meal before the flight. www.facsimiles.com

(1594-1665) and Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) or their apprentices as possible sources. A similar model would apply to the representation of *the Revelation of the Law on Mount Sinai*.<sup>20</sup>

A central motif in Seder ritual described in the depiction of the *Passover meal before the flight* (Folio 11r; Fig. 4) is, however, an exact replica of the etching in the printed *Amsterdam Haggadah* 1712 where the obligatory ten men surround the laid table with the sacrificial lamb, which is to be eaten in haste before the escape.

The heavy baroque interior of the copper etching in the *Amsterdam Haggadah* appears in Yehuda Leib's version as a theatrical *mise-en-scène*, opening towards a tranquil rural landscape. The depiction of the scenery is furthermore emphasized by an open door 'backstage', flanked by two oval windows through which the spires of a medieval township appear in *silhouette*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

<sup>21</sup> The scene is copied from *Icones Biblicae* (1625) or from *Figures de la Bible Demonstrans les Principales Histoires de la Sainte Ecriture* (c.1650). Sources for Abraham ben Ya'acov's copper etchings in the *Amsterdam Haggadah*. Cf. also Rachel Wischnitzer (1931) and Bendowska (2017).



Fig. 5: Forty years in the wilderness. [www.facsimiles.com](http://www.facsimiles.com)

Another panel modelled upon the two Amsterdam prototype versions (1695/1712) depicts the large troupe of escaping Israelites in their forty years of wandering through the wilderness before taking possession of the land, which, as the Lord had promised their forefathers, ‘would flow with milk and honey’, (Folio 19v; Fig. 5).<sup>22</sup>

The individual members in the long row of fugitives radiate optimism, enthusiasm and confidence in their leaders, Moses and Aron, who in their turn trust that the Lord, who appears as a ‘pillar of smoke’, will be their secure guide.<sup>23</sup> The company at the front are wearing partly contemporary and partly archaizing costumes. Noteworthy are the different hairstyles of the women and the artist’s endeavour to individualize the countenances of the group. The rhythmic movement of the composition is unending, e.g. in the diagonal from the child and mother, Moses to Aron to ‘the pillar of smoke’ (Joel 3:3). The atmosphere conveyed by the gestures and facial expressions of the party

<sup>22</sup> *Exodus* 3:8.

<sup>23</sup> The woman in rococo costume with her child in hand may be paraphrased from Baskind, *Etchings of Jews* (2007).

gives the impression of a peaceful *pastorale* rather than weary wandering in the desert.

All the examples from this sequel match Yehuda Leib's free and imaginative play between baroque, rococo, neoclassicism performed in his stylistically subtle and idealized design in a delicate and muted watercolour scheme.

### *The Extra-Biblical Sequence*

Yehuda Leib's artistic approach takes a distinct and dramatic turn in the extra-biblical illustrations. Here, he indulges in genuine improvisations upon motifs of known and unknown extraction. In so doing he furthermore applies advanced painting techniques embracing perspective, symmetry, and contrasting light-darkness, *chiaroscuro*, effects.

Unlike the Haggadah miniaturists of the Bohemia-Moravian school, our artist chooses to illustrate his Haggadah in terms of a psychological 'drama', expressed in the facial images of the figures and the thought-through genre motifs. He thus omits depictions of the threats, hardships, and atrocities the Israelites had to suffer during their dangerous flight from Egypt and the subsequent challenging 40 years of wandering through the desert on their way towards the Promised Land.<sup>24</sup>

*The Five Rabbis from Bnei Brak* (Folio 8r; Fig. 6) is a small artistic masterpiece. In this miniature the artist departs definitively from the Bohemia-Moravian style and creates his own version of the five learned rabbis, all of whom are known by name. They are engaged in an intense discussion on the ethical consequences of freedom *contra* bondage and the intellectual and existential implications of freedom from slavery.<sup>25</sup>

The intensity of this composition is accentuated by a stern and sharp colouring and a light and dark shading in contrast to the dimness behind the open door of the room, where the students, impatiently, announce that it is time for the morning prayer and for *shul*.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Exodus* 1:13-22 and 14:1-30.

<sup>25</sup> The scene is allegedly adapted from the motif of Joseph and his 12 brothers in Mathäus Merian, *Icones Biblicae* and subsequently transferred to the Amsterdam prototype Haggadah, 1695. The motif of five rabbis is depicted in the clumsy Moravian style in the Copenhagen Haggadah by Uri Feibush (1739). The scene is symbolically vital in as far as the ethical and existential discussion of the survival of the Jews as a people is concerned.

<sup>26</sup> 'shul' the Jiddisch word for 'learning'.



Fig. 6: The Five Rabbis. www.facsimiles.com



Fig. 7: The Four Sons. www.facsimiles.com



The scarlet-coloured Haggadah on the table is highlighted specifically in order to underline its role as the particular attraction of the Seder evening.<sup>27</sup>

Another popular group of images, *The Four Sons* in Yehuda Leib's Haggadah (Folio 6r; Fig. 7), is fundamentally different from the 'classical' setting in the Amsterdam editions of 1695 and 1712, respectively.

In the depictions by our artist the sons appear in individual frames and constitute a subtle gallery of small expressive 'portraits'. The artist seems to adhere to the editorial methodology of the three earliest printed Haggadot being the Prague edition of 1526<sup>28</sup>, the Mantua edition of 1560 and the Venice edition of 1609, in which the four sons are created as woodcuts installed in separate frames.<sup>29</sup> Most of the miniaturists of the Bohemia-Moravian school were in favour of the single-frame pattern of the Amsterdam prototype such as Uri Feibush Segal in his Haggadah, Altona 1739 (Fig. 8).<sup>30</sup>

Yehudah Leib Ha-Cohen portrays *The Wise Son* as an erudite rabbi seated in his study, furnished with heavy baroque draperies, and surrounded by his library of biblical and commentary volumes. He points with his *pince-nez* to an important passage in the open book with a gesture of empathy and enlightenment.

In contrast, *The Wicked Son* is depicted with a subtle satirical humour, theatrically, with his protruding belly and affable posture in a soldier's renaissance outfit.

A similar humorous approach applies to *The Simple Son*, who is wearing a rather boorish garb and portrayed with a dim-witted countenance expressing sheer ignorance.<sup>31</sup> It should be borne in mind, that the 18th century was an era in which theatre performances à la Molière were an extremely popular pastime in Denmark – and in Europe as a whole.<sup>32</sup>

The four-sons quartet culminates in the depiction of *a small child who does not know how to ask*, appearing as the innocent prince in the

<sup>27</sup> Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) would in this case be an obvious influence due to his accentuation of the scarlet red colour. See also Toeplitz comments, p.79, [Das Motiv] 'lassen eine Vorlage vermuten, die in den Schülerkreis Rembrandts verweist'.

<sup>28</sup> See note 44.

<sup>29</sup> In the printed Mantua Haggadah, the Wise Son is copied from the portrait of Jeremiah by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel and depicted with a Jewish headgear.

<sup>30</sup> See The Four Sons panel in Uri Feibush, Copenhagen Haggadah (1739) and Fishof (1999), 115-124.

<sup>31</sup> Toeplitz (1925: p.79) suggests a Flemish provenance of the model for this character.

<sup>32</sup> Ludvig Holberg, playwright and philosopher (1684-1754) was the Danish-Norwegian equivalent of Molière (1622-1673).



Fig. 7A: The Four Sons of the Leipnik Haggadah.

playroom riding his hobbyhorse; a person in whom Yehuda Leib invests his sympathy as well as his personal reverence for the Danish monarchy.

The prince is evidently a personification of the heir to the royal throne, being the grandson of Denmark’s enlightened King Frederik the 5th. The military drum in the right-hand corner of the miniature carries his grandfather king’s monogram (F5).<sup>33</sup> In this small panel Yehuda Leib performs a deliberate snapshot of an innocent prince all by himself playing as any other child in accordance with the pedagogic sentiment and educational child-centred philosophy of the 18th century.

<sup>33</sup> The monogram of Frederik 5th was, however, misunderstood by Toepflitz (1925:79), who mistook the initials F5 of the Danish monarch Frederik 5th for the German regent (F.R.) viz. Fridericus Rex.



Fig. 8: Celebration of the first paschal evening. [www.facsimiles.com](http://www.facsimiles.com)

Yehuda Leib digresses entirely in this composition and perception from the *Icones Biblicae -Amsterdam-Moravian* tradition of the four-sons motif, transforming and recreating the narrative and the design with his characteristic empathy, insight, and wit.

His ability to switch between genres and styles is furthermore exemplified in the representation of the *Seder meal in the bosom of the family* (Folio 13v; Fig. 8).

This scene is quite similar to a typical middle-class home of 18th century Copenhagen. The family is gathered around the ceremonial Passover Seder table. An atmosphere of *Biedermeier*' cosiness and self-esteem exudes togetherness and familiarity. The wife smiles affectionately at her two children, the younger of which is fast asleep, as the *pater familias* (*Ba'al HaBait*) raises the third wine cup of benediction. The seder plate is removed from the table by the housemaid, depicted with an impressionistic stroke of the brush, as she walks with the dish high above her head towards an invisible door in the background. The distinguished guest, seated with his back to the viewer, pays his compliment to the hostess, and in an oblique angle at the far left of the



Fig. 9: Balthasar Denner 1730 “Conversation Piece”. National Gallery of Denmark.

room the oldest frail member of the family is dimly visible inside the scarlet coloured alcove.<sup>34</sup>

The small genre painting of the family at the Seder table is composed in a form and a style similar to the *Five Sages from Bnei Brak* and may ultimately suggest Daniel Chodowietcki’s etchings as an inspirational source for the artist.<sup>35</sup> The inspirational impact might, ultimately, point to the German artist Balthasar Denner (1685-1749) who was active in Denmark as a miniaturist and purveyor of portraits to the royal court. His painting of a musical *séance en famille* is composed in darkish nuances illuminated by the red fur cap of the artist himself. The facial expressions render convincing reminiscences of some of Yehuda Leib’s themes, while disclosing mutual technical blunders in their depictions of indoor images.<sup>36</sup> (Fig. 9).

<sup>34</sup> Toeplitz (1925: 79) assumes the milieu to be Polish-German (Chodowiecki-inspired) and the garment of the guest ‘unverkennbar polnisch-jüdisch’. The rabbi, or student of Talmud-Tora, is often invited to a festive dinner. See, *Bilder aus dem Altjüdischen Familienleben* by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (1799-1882) as well as the popular conversations pieces of e.g. Balthasar Denner.

<sup>35</sup> An alcove in the Chodowiecki engraving of ‘La malade imaginaire’ (Molière), takes a similar oblique position.

<sup>36</sup> The red skullcap illuminates the darkness of the room. Cf. Hans Edvard Nørregård Nielsen (2003), pp. 148-149.



Fig. 10: Belshazzar's feast. [www.facsimiles.com](http://www.facsimiles.com)

### *The Tableaux D'art*

An illustration of *Belshazzar's great banquet*, which appears towards the end of the manuscript (Fol. 20, Fig. 10), is an unusual motif in the illustrative program of the Jewish Haggadah narrative.

The miniature itself is a delicate piece of art, the prototype of which cannot immediately be identified.

The dramatic episode depicts the Babylonian viceroy Belshazzar 'who grew drunk at a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, his consorts, and his concubines who drank from the golden vessels, which were stolen from the House of God in Jerusalem'. The fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote the enigmatic words *mene mene tekel upharsin* on the wall in front of Belshazzar. Daniel the seer was summoned to interpret the writing.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> The biblical book of Daniel 5:5. The words on the wall, presumed to be in Aramaic מנא מנא תקל ופרסין [*mene mene tekel upharsin*], may mean 'God has numbered your kingdom and brought it to an end', and eventually 'you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting'.

The two Amsterdam Haggadot do not present the Belshazzar theme in either of the two versions. It would be safe to assume that Yehuda Leib in this, as in other themes of our Haggadot, was inspired by the Flemish and Dutch schools of painting. The baroque interior of the banquet hall, the folded garments of the participants, especially those of the terrified orientally dressed vice emperor in the near centre of the miniature, and the suspended curtains, mark the baroque style. The axis from the right hand of Belshazzar to the woman turning her head away with a deprecating gesture towards the writing on the wall is accomplished with sustained virtuosity.

And Daniel appears as a 'prophet' in a commanding posture of solemnity accentuated by his contrasting dark raiment. Dutch influence stands out in this figure. The light from the right illuminates the room dramatically and gives free reign to the artist's application of *chiaroscuro*.

In contradistinction to the biblical canon of the Christians, in which Daniel is regarded as a prophet, the rabbinic biblical canon (*Tanach*) considers Daniel a 'seer'. *The Book of Daniel* is consequently included in the chapters of *Ketuvim* (the Writings) and does not appear in the chapter of *Nevi'im* (The Prophets).

Yehuda Leib's reason for including the illustration of the Belshazzar and Daniel issue in his Haggadah may be twofold.

Firstly, due to the Haggadah itself justifying a mention of *Belshazzar's Feast* in the iterative refrain of the text, *vaihi be hetsi layla* ('so it came to pass in the middle of the night')<sup>38</sup>. Secondly, to hint at an ostensible connection between the depiction of the Belshazzar motif and the enigmatic statement in the colophon to the effect that his Haggadah was agreed upon and made in keeping with the 'terms of the freemasons' ['inyan ha-bana'im].<sup>39</sup>

Yehuda Leib may have accepted this as a premise for a compromise regarding a commission from the newly established Copenhagen lodge of the freemasons and agreed to insert the illustration of Daniel 'the prophet', thus emphasising the fact that Belshazzar, according to the Hebrew text, was defiling the ceremonial vessels from the Holy Temple.

<sup>38</sup> *Exodus* 12:19.

<sup>39</sup> 'bana'im', possibly referring to the Freemasons who established themselves in Copenhagen in 1745, with their Lodge in close proximity to one of the Sefardi synagogues in the city.



Fig. 11: The Temple of Jerusalem. [www.facsimiles.com](http://www.facsimiles.com)

Artistically and technically, Yehuda Leib surpasses himself in this accomplished composition, combining his sense of style, iconography, colouring, and room perspective into a perfect synthesis.<sup>40</sup>

The drama of the scene is given special weight by Daniel's stern appearance, wrapped in a black coat and with oriental headgear. Standing statue-like and ominous at the head of the table, causing the party, including Belshazzar, to tumble from their chairs gesticulating in panic and hiding their faces from the threatening writing on the wall.<sup>41</sup>

In the penultimate illustration, *Beit HaMikdash* (Fol. 22v; Fig. 11), Yehuda Leib switches mode again, changing from the tumultuous scene of Belshazzar's feast to tranquillity and equilibrium in the depiction of the *Temple in Jerusalem* shaped as a humble *rotunda*, an architectural form in either a baroque or a rococo context. Yehuda Leib was evidently acquainted with the Haggadah printed in Venezia in 1695, where the Temple of Jerusalem has the rotunda form within the

<sup>40</sup> Toeplitz notes in passing a possible influence from Ruben's apprentices.

<sup>41</sup> The question is whether Yehuda Leib Ha-Cohen has copied the scene from an (unknown) engraver, or if he in fact is the sole master of the composition.



Fig. 11A: The Temple of Jerusalem in the Copenhagen Haggada.

walls of an 'ideal city'. He may even have been acquainted with Donato Bramante's graceful *Tempietto* of Rome (1502)<sup>42</sup> (Fig. 11). The serenity and balance of the temple motif is emphasised by a sustained symmetry and perspective by the rows of red marble pillars in front and the garden with vegetation *a la chinoiserie* at the back. The soft colour and the haze in the background add a solemn tranquillity to the entire image.

The last miniature of the Haggadah illustrates the children's song *Chad Gadya* (Fol. 25v; Fig. 12) theme. Yehuda Leib manages to include the story within one panel but excludes the Angel of Death and representation of the Almighty.

The result is a rather overcrowded composition. Like his contemporary artist Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755)<sup>43</sup>, who had hunting scenes as his speciality, Yehuda Leib faced difficulties in portraying the heads of the ox, the dog and the cat, the latter having a more human than animal-like face. But Yehuda Leib's arrangement and depiction of the drama according to a deliberate figurative scheme unveils him as a painter who aspires to the attainment of harmony and balance in his composition,

<sup>42</sup> The style has characteristic traits of the rococo era in Denmark. The reddish marmorized columns were predominant in the banquet hall of the Prince's Palais, today the National Museum in Copenhagen. The Holy Arc is visible in the open doorway of the rotunda. A near exact model in Kraus, *Historische Bilder-Bibel*, 1705.

<sup>43</sup> Also known as illustrator of *The Fables of Fontaine*.





Fig. 12: Children's song of the goat. www.facsimiles.com

placing the characters near the frames and the ferocious animals at the centre of the composition.

The story is based on a children's song<sup>44</sup> with repetitive *refrains*, and Yehuda Leib may intentionally have left it to the members of the family to interpret the illustration while singing the song.

For Yehuda Leib himself it was yet another challenge to his ambitions as a miniaturist. The song is freely illustrated without depicting the characters strictly and thoroughly according to the text. The kid is modelled as ram. As with the other animals in the group, it does not reach the artistic level of the three characters involved.

The slaughterer to the right of the panel and the two persons to the left are well proportioned, lively, and plastically depicted. The father who buys the kid is portrayed much in the same style as 'the simple son' (Fol. 6r). The person to whom he pays the two pennies (*zuzim*) for the

<sup>44</sup> Written in Aramaic, *Chad Gadya* is reminiscent of a German folk song with no clear reference to the haggadic context, except keeping the children from falling asleep during the ceremony.

kid is wrapped in an oriental costume and wears a turban<sup>45</sup>. But neither the Angel of Death nor the Holy Angel are present in this *tableau*.

### *A Paradigm Shift*

Yehuda Leib Ha-Cohen's artistic approach does not fit entirely into the haggadic tradition in general nor into any specific established style or art historic current of the 18th century. His choice of motif, iconography and stylistic elements regarding the biblical illustrations are indeed inspired by etchings by Mathäeus Merian, Johann Kraus, and, eventually, Abraham ben Ya'acov in the printed Amsterdam Haggadah prototypes of 1695/1712, which inspired the members of the Bohemia-Moravian miniature school in the first place.

But Yehuda Leib expands his artistic universe with his personal perception and expression, thus creating a completely new haggadic pictorial cycle in an innovative miniature style that is truly Jewish in content, but artistically expressed in 18th century European modes of art.

Unlike the miniaturists of the Bohemia-Moravian school, Yehuda Leib lends himself to an 'academic' and international approach. He introduces a deliberate artistic method and painting technique of the Haggadah cycle, which presupposes artistic nerve as well as a well-founded knowledge of contemporary European art, knowledge he may have acquired in the newly established Art Academies in the European capital cities and, perhaps, at the biannual *Salons* in Paris.

But Yehuda Leib Ha-Cohen settled in Copenhagen during an era of political enlightenment and commercial and economic prosperity, an era with an enormous dynamic impact on the cultural and intellectual life in the Danish capital after years of exhausting wars.

The ruling monarch, Frederik 5th, invited painters, sculptors, and architects mainly from Germany, France and the Netherlands to perform their art and craft in the royal palaces and mansions of the nobility.

Some of these visiting artists remained in the country as directors and teachers at the Academy of Art<sup>46</sup> or as educators, paving the way

<sup>45</sup> A possible reference to one of the interpretations of *Chad Gadya* in which the Turk represents 'The Angel of Death'.

<sup>46</sup> Inaugurated by King Frederik 5th. The first charter of The Royal Academy of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in Copenhagen opened by 31. March 1754, giving access to artists and craftsmen regardless of social and national status.

for a coming generation of Danish artists, who were to become the forerunners of the Golden Age of 19th century Danish art.

Yehuda Leib was eclectic in his artistic approach in the sense that he let himself be influenced by the three dominating artistic and stylistic trends of the 18th century, all of which were represented in the township of Copenhagen and in mansions and castles of the nobility in the Danish countryside in general.

Furthermore, being an immigrant, he was a representative of an artistic transition in Denmark from Enlightenment to Romanticism before the incipient 'Golden Age'. Simultaneously, he marked a decisive departure from the 'naïve' folkloristic style of the bygone Bohemia-Moravian school of book painting.

In short, Yehuda Leib was inevitably influenced by the dominant cultural currents, and his small collection of Haggadah miniatures may be considered a palpable result of this influence.

Whether his Haggadah is art *per se* or *kleinkunst* may seem a rather irrelevant question. His artistic achievements were first and foremost manifested in his ability to perceive and assimilate the circulating stylistic trends and adapt them 'eclectically' to his personal style.

A final question remains, however, as to how or by whom his little work of art was commissioned. It is highly probable that our artist was in contact with one or several small Jewish congregations in Copenhagen.<sup>47</sup> But as yet nothing points to a Jewish benefactor or to economic support from a well-to-do Jewish congregation or a royal patron.

It may eventually be assumed that a member of the newly established Masonic lodge in Copenhagen<sup>48</sup> acted as a go-between and commissioner in recognition of his talent as a miniaturist, and that Yehuda Leib expressed his gratitude discreetly in the colophon and artfully by bringing the controversial tableau of Belshazzar's Feast to the fore.

<sup>47</sup> Besides the two mentioned *Haggadot*, he is most likely the decorator of a 'Tora Binder' in the Copenhagen Danish Jewish Museum.

<sup>48</sup> The singular reference to 'the builders' [i.e. The Masons] in the colophon of the Yehuda Leib Haggadah found its parallel in a miniature manuscript prayer book acquired by the Hebrew Department of Library Congress in 2014. It is created by Joseph ben Mayer Schmalkalden in Mainz, Germany c.1745. The important artefact סדר קריאת שמע על המיטה (*Order of Prayers before Retiring at Night*) has been described and commented upon by dr. Ann Brener for a companion volume of a forthcoming facsimile. We gratefully acknowledge the permission to refer to the as yet unpublished *commentarium*.

*The Danish Haggadah* with its fourteen small independent miniatures, written and illustrated by Yehuda Leib ben Eliyya Ha-Cohen, were included in the *Encyclopaedia of Danish Art*<sup>49</sup> in 1994 as the ultimate recognition of the creator of his *Haggadah* 1769 as a Danish miniature artist.

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## SUMMARY

ULF G. HAXEN: *An Artist in the Making – Yehuda Leib ben Eliyya Ha-Cohen's Haggadah, Copenhagen, 1769*

'Eclecticism' as an artistic term refers to an approach rather than a style, and is generally used to describe the combination of different elements from various art-historical periods – or pejoratively to imply a lack of originality. Proponents of eclecticism argue more favourably, however, with reference to the 16th century Carracci family and their Bolognese followers, that the demands of modernity (i.e. the new Baroque style) could be met by skilful adaptation of art features from various styles of the past.

The essay concerns the eighteenth century scribe and miniaturist Yehuda Leib ben Eliyah Ha-Cohen's illustrated *Haggadah* liturgy of the second book of the, Old Testament *Exodus*, which represents a shift of paradigm away from the traditional Bohemia-Moravian school of Jewish book-painting towards a new approach. Our artist experiments freely, and to a certain extent successfully, with a range of different styles, motifs, themes, and iconographical traits, such as *conversation pieces*.

Yehuda Leib Ha-Cohen may have abandoned his home-town, the illustrious rabbinic center Lissa/Leszno in Poland, after a fire devastated its Jewish quarter in 1767. He migrated to Denmark and lived and worked in Copenhagen for at least ten years, as indicated by two of his extant works, dated Copenhagen 1769 and 1779 respectively. He was thus a contemporary of another Danish Jewish master of the Bohemia – Moravian school, Uri Feibush ben Yitshak Segal, whose iconic miniature work *The Copenhagen Haggadah* (1739) is well-known by art historians in the field.

Yehuda Leib Ha-Cohen drew some of his Haggadic themes from two main sources, the *Icones Biblicae* by Mathäus Merian and the Amsterdam *Haggadot* 1695 and 1712 (e.g. *Pit'om and Ramses, The Meal Before the Flight*). He never imitates his models, however. He adapts the standard motifs according to his own stylistic perception of symmetry and perspective, furnishing the illustrations with a muted gouache colouring.

Several of his Haggadic themes are executed with inventiveness, pictorial imagination, and a subtle sense of humour, such as *The Seder Table, The Four Sons, The Finding of the Infant Moses, Solomon's Temple, and Belshazzars Feast*.

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Yehuda Leib's enigmatic reference to the 'the masons' (Hebrew **הַבְּנָאִים**) in the manuscript's colophon has until now hardly been satisfactorily interpreted. Incidentally, however, another Hebrew prayer-book written and decorated by Mayer Schmalkalden in Mainz in 1745, recently acquired by Library of Congress, bears the same phrase (*fi 'inyan ha-bana'im* = according to the code of the Masons). Dr. Ann Brener, a Hebrew specialist at the Oriental Department of Library of Congress, suggests in an unpublished essay, that the reference may be an allusion to 'the Talmudic scholars who engage in building up the world of civilization', (*The Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 114a*).

However that may be, Yehuda Leib Ha-Cohen's miniatures constitute a veritable change of paradigm as far as eighteenth-century Hebrew book illustration is concerned.

