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The Scribes and Artists
Celeste Pan | Oxford

The Scribes and Artists of Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19

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Article

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Abstract

A liturgical Pentateuch manuscript made in Brussels in 1309 (now Hamburg, SUB, Cod. Levy 19) is one of very few surviving Ashkenazic manuscripts from this period to contain a colophon by a Jewish artist. It therefore offers a unique and fascinating case study of Jews working as artists in medieval Ashkenaz. But numerous fundamental questions concerning the division of work in this manuscript have not been answered. In this article, I attempt to sketch out a clearer picture of the manuscript's production process and the artisans who participated in it, drawing on both internal evidence and comparisons with related manuscripts.

Keywords

Hebrew manuscripts; medieval art; illuminated manuscripts; Hebrew Bible; liturgical pentateuch; *ḥumash*; Low Countries; Brussels; Hamburg, State and University Library, Cod. Levy 19; Iẓḥak b. Eliahu; Yehudah haKohen

Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Cod. Levy 19, a liturgical pentateuch manuscript made in Brussels in 1309,[1] is one of very few extensively-illuminated manuscripts from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Ashkenaz[2] that was demonstrably decorated by Jewish artists.[3] Since the decorations in the majority of the best-known illuminated Hebrew manuscripts from the same

[1] The liturgical pentateuch (*ḥumash, pl. ḥumashim* in Hebrew) was a common codicological genre for biblical manuscripts in medieval Ashkenaz, comprising the Pentateuch proper (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) divided into *parashiyot* or weekly lections; the *haftarot* (readings that follow the *parashiyot*, taken from the books of Prophets); and often also the Five Scrolls (Ruth, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther) and Job which were read during Holiday services. These manuscripts, which bring together all the necessary biblical readings for Jewish liturgy, often feature complex layouts where several textual components (the biblical text alongside an Aramaic translation, and/or verse-by-verse commentaries) run in parallel. See also Stern 2012, 235–322 and in particular 290–299, and Stern 2018, 105–117.

[2] The term 'Ashkenaz' was originally used in medieval rabbinic literature to denote Germany; in modern scholarship, it is usually used in the broader and more flexible sense of areas of Jewish settlement in northern Europe (in contradistinction to Iberia or Italy), which varies in its geographical extent from century to century. In the period under discussion (the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries), this area largely corresponds to present-day northern and eastern France, western Germany, Switzerland, the Low Countries and England, and it is this area that I refer to when I use the term 'Ashkenaz'.

[3] This is indicated by the verse colophon written by the artist/corrector at fol. 625^{r}. For previous mentions of the artist's colophon in Cod. Levy 19, see Zirlin 2015, 30; Beit-Arié 2021, 135–136. Illuminators' colophons are not common in medieval manuscripts in general, but further examples among Hebrew manuscripts from other geocultural zones and periods include Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, MS 72 (Cervera, 1300); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Kennicott 1 (La Coruña, 1476); as well as the corpus of manuscripts produced by Joel b. Simeon and his workshop in southern Germany and northern Italy during the latter half of the fifteenth century. On Joel b. Simeon, see for example Gutmann 1970, Beit-Arié 1977, Narkiss 1991, Kogman-Appel 2011, Zirlin 2015.

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period and region have been attributed to Christian workshops,[4] and since manuscript decoration that can safely be ascribed to Jewish hands (usually on paleographical and codicological grounds) generally takes the form of micrography or monochrome/duochrome penwork, Cod. Levy 19 is an unusual and important witness to the fact that in Ashkenaz at the turn of the fourteenth century, some Jewish scribe-artists went beyond micrographical and penwork decoration, and employed similar materials and techniques to those used by professional illuminators.[5] Its elaborate and idiosyncratic programme of decoration draws attention to the phenomenon of Jews working as artists in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Ashkenaz, which despite its obvious importance has remained a largely underexplored topic.[6]

I contend that pen-drawn and painted decorations attributable to Jewish artists deserve further study, since these have the potential of adding to our current understanding of Hebrew manuscript production in medieval Europe, and also of Jewish engagement with the visual and material culture of their surroundings.[7] On account of both the richness of its decorations, and the relative abundance of information we have about the context of its production, Cod. Levy 19 provides a suitable and fruitful starting point to this larger enquiry. This article takes the form of a case study, but other manuscripts decorated by Jewish artists will be cited for comparison wherever appropriate.

So far, the few existing publications on Cod. Levy 19 either give general overviews of the manuscript and its programme of decoration, or consider specific issues of iconography.[8] There has been no attempt to examine in detail the practical and stylistic aspects of the artist's work (which may give some indication on how and where he learned his craft), and to situate him both locally in relation to the other makers of the manuscript, and more broadly within the context of Hebrew manuscript production in the Low Countries during the early-fourteenth century. It is my aim to fill as much of this gap as possible in this article.

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[4] These include the 'Michael Mahzor' (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Michael 617; Rhineland, 1257–58); the 'Laud Mahzor' (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Or. 321; Rhineland, *c.*1270–1280); the 'Wroclaw Mahzor' (Wroclaw, State and University Library, Or. I. 1; Rhineland, *c.*1275–1300); the 'North French Hebrew Miscellany' (London, British Library, Add MS 11639; northern France, *c.*1278–1298); the 'Kaufmann Mishneh Torah' (Budapest, Dávid Kaufmann Collection, MS A 77; northeastern France, 1296); and the 'Lake Constance' group of manuscripts (southwestern Germany, *c.*1300–1320; for a full list of manuscripts see Shalev-Eyni 2010).

[5] Other Ashkenazic illuminated manuscripts where the Jewish identity of (at least one of) the artists can be proven, usually on the basis of paleographical and codicological information, include the 'Worms Mahzor' (Jerusalem, National Library of Israel, MS Heb. 4o781/1; Würzburg, 1272); the 'Amsterdam Mahzor' (Amsterdam, Jewish Historical Museum; Cologne, *c.*1250); Paris, BnF, MS Hébreu 4 (Lorraine or Franche-Comté, 1286); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Arch. Selden A.5 and Paris, BnF, MS Hébreu 643 (Lövenich (?), *c.*1300–1325).

[6] In general, scholars working on Ashkenazic manuscript decoration from this period have focused more on the richly-illuminated examples (the majority of which, as mentioned in footnote 3, were demonstrably illuminated by Christians; in many of the remaining cases the religious/ethnic background of the artist is unclear), and less on manuscripts with humbler forms of decoration. In the case of fifteenth-century Ashkenaz, on the other hand, the manuscripts copied and decorated by the Jewish scribe-artist Joel b. Simeon and his workshop has been extensively studied; see for example Zirlin 2015, Hindman and Liberman Mintz 2020. The only major exception is micrography, which over the recent decades has been justly recognised as a uniquely Jewish art form and intensely studied from both art-historical and philological perspectives; as a starting point, see Liss and Leipziger 2021.

[7] The most in-depth study of manuscripts in this corpus remains the online entries in the Bezalel Narkiss Index of Jewish Art; see for example Kanon, Cohen-Mushlin and Levy 2014.

[8] For the former see Wandrey 2014, Shalev-Eyni 2018; for the latter see Shalev-Eyni 2020.

My discussion is divided into four parts. In the first section, I describe the production process and justify my chronological ordering of the different stages of production and my separation of scribal hands. In Section 2, I take a closer look at one of the masoretes, Yehudah haKohen, whose hand is attested in several other surviving manuscripts copied in the Duchy of Brabant during the first decade of the fourteenth century; I will consider the role performed by Yehudah *vis-à-vis* another scribe who collaborated with him on all these manuscripts, and track the continuities and changes in Yehudah's work as scribe and artist as a way of reconstructing the general trajectory of his career. In Section 3, I turn to the main illuminator of Cod. Levy 19; I will discuss his stylistic influence on Yehudah and the extent of his involvement in the production process of Cod. Levy 19, ending with several proofs that the main artist and the main scribe of the manuscript were in fact the same person, one Iẓḥak b. Eliahu who was most likely from Oxford, England but came of age and received training in the Duchy of Brabant. Finally, in Section 4, I examine the programme of decoration in Cod. Levy 19 in light of this new information.

1. The Scribes

Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Cod. Levy 19 is a liturgical pentateuch, containing the Pentateuch proper (Genesis to Deuteronomy; fols 1–401) followed by the weekly and festival *haftarot* (fols 402–478), the Five Scrolls with the Aramaic Dream of Mordechai (fols 479–600) and Job (fols 601–624).[9] In the Pentateuch proper and the Five Scrolls, the Masoretic Text and the Aramaic Targum are written in alternating verses in the two central columns; both textual components are written in a square script of the same size, and there is no visual cue that distinguishes the one from the other. Rashi's commentary, written in semi-cursive script, is copied along the upper, lower and outer margins throughout.[10] There is masorah magna for the Pentateuch proper and the Five Scrolls (except for Ruth), copied along the upper and lower margins, sometimes as *carmina figurata* where the lengths of the lines are manipulated to form shapes, which are subsequently outlined by the masorete in brown or red ink. The masorah parva, in a different hand from the masorah magna, ends abruptly at fol. 289^{v} (Numbers, *parashat ḥukat*) and is not resumed. Comprising 626 thin parchment folios and with a dimension of 210 × 165 mm, the codex is bulky but still relatively light and portable.

[9] For a more detailed definition of the liturgical pentateuch and further reading, see footnote 1. Here I use the term 'Pentateuch proper' with an upper-case 'P' to distinguish this textual concept (consisting only of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, also called the Torah or the Five Books of Moses) from the codicological concept of the liturgical pentateuch (with a lower-case 'p'), which usually also incorporates other textual units as mentioned in footnote 1.

[10] Rashi, acronym for Rabbi Shelomo b. Iẓḥak (1040–1105), was the leading medieval Ashkenazic commentator on the Bible and Talmud; he lived and taught primarily in Troyes, then capital of the County of Champagne. In liturgical pentateuch manuscripts from the late-thirteenth century onwards, in particular those from France, Rashi's commentary was often included either alongside the Aramaic Targum, or as a replacement for it. The *Sefer Miẓvot Gadol* ('The Great Book of Commandments'; acronym SeMaG) written by Moses b. Jacob of Coucy in 1247, a halakhic work that discusses the 613 commandments, contains the earliest known recommendation that Rashi's commentary on the Torah be read instead of the Targum. See Stern 2012, 293, 302–308.

The scribal colophon on fols 624^{v}–625^{r} gives the date of the completion of the project as Sunday of *parashat vayera*, the 17th of Marḥeshvan, in the year 5070 after Creation, and the location as Brussels in the Duchy of Brabant (ברושיילש מתא היושבת בארץ ברבן).[11] But there is a problem: the 17th of Marḥeshvan in the year 5070, corresponding to 22 October, 1309 in the Julian calendar, was not a Sunday but a Wednesday. This means that at least one piece of information given by the scribe must have been wrong and, considering both the centrality of the Sabbath in medieval Jewish life and the fact that the day of the week is mentioned twice, it is highly unlikely that the scribe could have been mistaken about its being a Sunday. There must therefore be an error either in the year or the date; and since the 17th of Marḥeshvan can never fall on a Sunday, it would necessarily follow that the correct date was not the 17th.[12] Assuming that it would be equally unlikely for the scribe to be wrong about the *parashah* of the week, the correct date is probably Sunday the 14th of Marḥeshvan, 5070 (19 October, 1309 in the Julian calendar).[13] This mistake arose possibly because of the similar spelling of the Hebrew numbers 4 (ארבע) and 7 (שבע), or alternatively may have something to do with the fact that the 14th day of Marḥeshvan was also the 17th day before Kislev.[14]

The main scribe identifies himself as Iẓḥak the Scribe, son of Ḥazzan Eliahu from 'אוכשונפורט'. This locality has been interpreted either as Oxford (*Oxonia*) in England (spelt Oxenford – with the additional middle syllable – in Middle English from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, and spelt 'אושינפורט' or 'אושנפורט' in the Hebrew Deeds),[15] or Ochsenfurt (*Oxovium*, spelt 'אוחשנוורת' in the Memorbuch of Nuremberg) in Franconia,[16] two towns that are almost exactly equidistant (around 405 km) from Brussels, both of which have well-documented histories of Jewish settlement up to the late thirteenth century, as well as significant episodes of persecution during or just before the 1290s.[17] Since the colophon is ambiguous as to whether it was Iẓḥak or his father Eliahu who emigrated, any regional characteristic in Iẓḥak's spelling of the place name, or indeed in his handwriting, is unlikely to shed decisive light on the question of whether he was of English or German origin, since he may well have received his training in Brabant; indeed, from the perspective of script, the pronounced horizontal elongation of Iẓḥak's letters, as well as their trapezoid rather

[11] The relevant part of the scribal colophon reads: באחד בשבת בשבעה עשר יום לירח מרחשון שנת חמשת אלפים ושבעים לבריאת עולם למנין שאנו מנין כאן בברושיילש מתא היושבת בארץ ברבן אני יצחק הסופר ב׳ר׳ אליהו חזן מאוכשונפורט סימתי זה הספר יום א׳ פ׳ וירא לר׳ חיים בן הק׳ ר׳ חיים יזכנו השם להגות בו ולירשו הוא וזרעו וזרע זרעו עד סוף כול הדורות אמ׳ אמ׳ אמ׳ סלה (My translation: On the first day after Shabbat, on the seventeenth day of the month Marḥeshvan, the year 5070 after Creation according to the reckoning by which we count, here in Brussels, a town which is in the land of Brabant – I, Iẓḥak the Scribe, son of Eliahu the Cantor from Okhsonfurt, finished this book on Sunday of *parashat vayera*, for Rabbi Ḥayyim, son of the martyr Rabbi Ḥayyim, may God make him and his heirs worthy to meditate upon it, him and his offspring and the offspring of his offspring until the end of all the generations, amen, amen, amen selah.)

[12] The only possible weekdays on which 17 Marḥeshvan may fall are Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

[13] This inconsistency was noted as early as in Birnbaum 1934, 237, but he does not investigate this further and implies instead that it is the day of the week that is wrong. Wandrey 2014 also notes both possible dates, but once again implies her preference of 17 Marḥeshvan by enclosing '14' within brackets.

[14] What appears to be a reverse mistake, substituting the number 4 for 7, is found on fol. 619^{r} of the North French Hebrew Miscellany (London, British Library, Add MS 11639), where Chapter 7 is introduced as Chapter 4.

[15] Davis 1888, 37, 144.

[16] Salfeld 1898, 31, 78.

[17] See Birnbaum 1934; Roth 1951, 151–168; Flade 1996, 23–24.

than rectangular shape where the letters tend to expand from right to left, do not closely resemble manuscripts that can be readily localised to either England or Franconia, and the closest analogues known to me are certain manuscripts localised to the area around the current Franco-German border, including the 'Amsterdam Mahzor' (Amsterdam, Jewish Historical Museum) which was most likely copied in Cologne in the mid-thirteenth century, and two manuscripts copied by the same scribe in 1291 and 1299 respectively that that have been localised to Burgundy.[18] Since the Duchy of Brabant was also situated in this wider region, it is likely that Iẓḥak completed his scribal training in Brabant rather than at his place of origin; he was probably not a recent immigrant at the time of the manuscript's completion.

In light of this, Birnbaum's argument for an Oxford origin, based on the Hebrew spelling of the name of the town (and mainly on the use of the letter *pe* to represent /f/ which was common among Anglo-French Jews while German Jews used *vav*), is therefore of limited use. By contrast, Cecil Roth's identification of the same Hebrew spelling used for Oxford in several late-thirteenth-century Hebrew sources (including a Merton deed and an autograph of Gamaliel of Oxford) is more persuasive, since it suggests that Iẓḥak's spelling was most likely not a spontaneous transliteration but based on written sources.[19] This makes Oxford the more probable place of origin for either Iẓḥak or his father, Ḥazzan Eliahu.

The colophon also identifies the patron of the manuscript, Ḥayyim, whose father Ḥayyim (as several scholars have already pointed out) was most likely martyred before the birth of his son, as indicated by the abbreviated honorific 'ק' for 'קדוש' ('holy').[20]

Iẓḥak the Scribe was responsible for the copying of the Hebrew text and Targum Onkelos throughout, as well as almost all of Rashi's Commentary.[21] The vocalisation was done by two vocalisers (A and B) who changed hands at the beginning of Quire 41 at fol. 497^{r}; this is indicated by the change in the script used for longer corrections on the margins (the corrections are clearly in the same shade of ink as the vocalisation for the respective lines) (Figs 1a, 1b), and also by the slightly different appearance of the vocalisation marks themselves (Figs 1c, 1d). Vocaliser A's vocalisation marks have stronger shading (as seen especially clearly in the vertical parts of *qamaẓ* and *ḥatef qamaẓ* signs and the horizontally-elongated appearance of the dots) and the horizontal dashes are shorter and well-separated from each other, whereas in the case of Vocaliser B the shading is weaker and the horizontal dashes in *qamaẓ*, *ḥatef qamaẓ*, *pataḥ* and *ḥatef pataḥ* frequently touch each other, inadvertently forming longer horizontal lines.

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[18] On the localisation of the Amsterdam Mahzor see van der Heide and van Voolen 1989. These two latter manuscripts are Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, MS Plut.3.3 (1291); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Kennicott 3 (1299). Two further fragments (Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MSS. Parm 2696, 3088) can also be attributed to the same scribe on paleographical grounds, see Steimann 2025, 11–15.

[19] Roth 1951, 117, 167. See also Olszowy-Schlanger 2015, 662–663 (No. 224), 682–683 (No. 230).

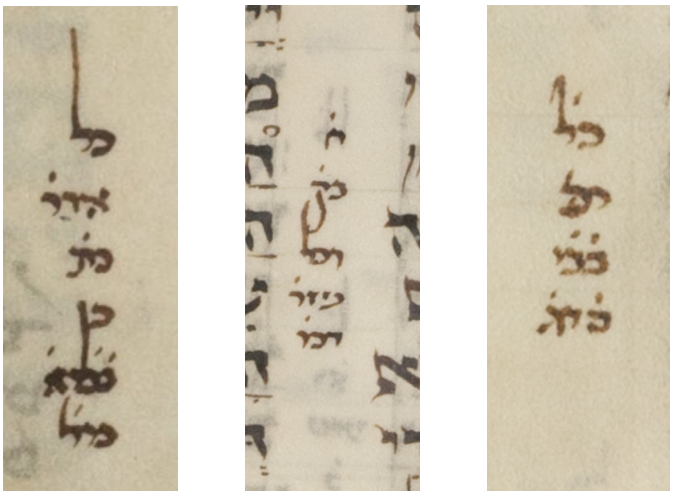
[20] See Birnbaum 1934, 237; Roth 1951, 167 (where he proposes the speculative identification of the elder Ḥayyim as Vives le Lung of Oxford, executed *c.*1282); Beit-Arié 2021, 133–134. If Roth's identification is correct, then we may suppose the existence of a network of English Jews who resettled in Brabant after the Expulsion and remained in close association with each other over the following decades.

[21] With the sole exception of fols 11^{v}–12^{v} in the first quire, where Rashi's Commentary is copied by a different hand, most likely the scribe of the masorah magna (Yehudah haKohen) on the basis of similarities in the script.

Figs 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fols 451^{v} (A), 528^{r} (B), 496^{v} (A), 497^{r} (B) , details. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

The vocalised text was subsequently checked and corrected by a hand different from those of the two vocalisers; this hand also noted the total number of letters, words and verses for the majority of the biblical books, and wrote both the alphabetic list of phrases from the Torah accompanying the opening miniature at fol. 1^{v}, and the illuminator's colophon at fol. 625^{r}. This hand belongs, therefore, to the Jewish illuminator who was also the final corrector of the manuscript; some scholars have proposed that this artist-corrector was none other than the main scribe, Iẓḥak b. Eliahu, while others treat the artist-corrector as a different person from the scribe. The relationship between Iẓḥak b. Eliahu and the artist-corrector will be considered in Section 3.

It appears that the artist-corrector's corrections were made before the masorah parva was copied, since there are numerous instances where the corrections cause the masorah parva to be written out of its usual alignment (fols 141^{r}, 256^{v}). The masorah parva had only been added up to fol. 289 (Numbers, *parashat ḥukat*), in a rather graceless and informal square script of the early-fourteenth century which is different from the scripts of the main scribe Iẓḥak, the masorete responsible for the masorah magna, and the two vocalisers – henceforth I will refer to the scribe who copied the



Figs. 2a, 2b, 2c: Details from Hamburg, Staats- und Universitäts-bibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fols 27^{r}, 143^{v}, 260^{r}. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

masorah parva as Masorete C. Particularly notable features of Masorete C's handwriting include the top-heavy and rather unstable-looking *alef* with a distinctive lean to the left, the rounded *pe* with its nose formed by a single, detached stroke, the base of *mem* which curves slightly upwards, and the long, curling descender of *kof* (see Figs 2a, 2b, 2c). The possibility that he was a later owner can be safely ruled out, since there are several signs that the masorah parva was copied before Rashi's commentary, the most persuasive one being that the gap between the main text columns and Rashi's commentary becomes noticeably more narrow after the discontinuation of the masorah parva from fol. 290 onwards – Iẓḥak the Scribe had clearly modified his ruling scheme knowing that he would no longer need to make space for the masorah parva. This confirms that rather than being a later owner, Masorete C was a contemporary and colleague of the other scribes who, for an unknown reason, did not carry his portion of the work to completion.

The next textual component to be added was Rashi's commentary, which was copied by Iẓḥak the Scribe in a semi-square script. That it was copied after the masorah parva has already been shown; on the other hand, it precedes the copying of the masorah magna, as demonstrated by cases where penwork flourishes from the Rashi column reach into the space usually occupied by the masorah magna, and cause the masorah magna to be written around the penwork flourishes, creating random and syntactically-irrelevant gaps in the text (see fols 116^{r}, 358^{v}).

2. The Scribe-Artist Yehuda haKohen

The masorah magna itself was copied by a scribe-artist who left no colophon, though he indicated his name by decorating, on 10 separate occasions, certain words in the masorah magna with small tendrils composed of dotted lines: fols 87^{v} (Yehudah); 165^{r} (Yehudah); 191^{r} (Yehudah); 192^{r} (Yehudah); 198^{r} (haKohen); 214^{v} (Yehudah); 243^{r} (Yehudah); 245^{r} (Yehudah); 356^{v} (Kohen); 539^{v} (Kohen). This implies that the masorete's name was Yehudah haKohen. I have been able to identify his hand in two other manuscripts copied only a few years before Cod. Levy 19. One of these (London, British Library, Add MS 18424) is a short halakhic collection containing the *Tashbets*

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(date of composition unknown) by Samson b. Zadok (d. 1312) and *Sefer ha-terumah* (*c*.1204) by Baruch b. Isaac, copied most likely in Tienen in Brabant (written as 'טינמונט', 'Tienmont', close to the French name for the same town, 'Tirlemont') in 1307;[22] the other (Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS 3518) is a prayer book of the French rite, completed in 1305 or 1306 at an undisclosed locality.[23] Both the French liturgy of the Parma prayer book and the French town name in the London manuscript indicate that the scribes and patrons of the manuscripts were probably French-speaking rather than Dutch-speaking, even though both Brussels and Tienen were primarily Dutch-speaking at the time.[24] Both manuscripts were copied by two scribes, with Yehudah carrying out the larger part of the work (fols 1^{r}–32^{v} and 42^{v}–44^{v} [35 fols in total] in the London manuscript; fols 19^{r}–37^{v} [19 fols in total] in the Parma manuscript) and the other, unnamed scribe completing fols 33^{r}–42^{v} (10 fols) in the London manuscript and fols 1^{v}–18^{v} (18 fols) in the Parma manuscript. Since the changes in scribal hands generally correspond to changes in the style of decoration (apart from the final 3 folios of the London manuscript, which are copied by Yehudah but continue to be decorated by the unnamed scribe), it can be assumed that the scribes decorated the sections that they had copied themselves.

My identification of one of the scribes of Add MS 18424 and Parma MS 3518 as the same Yehudah haKohen who worked on Cod. Levy 19 is guided by the fact that in the portions of the two manuscripts copied by this scribe, the words Yehudah and Kohen have been picked out in the same manner.[25] This is confirmed by a comparison of the scripts: Even allowing for the difference in register (Yehudah's script used for the main text in the London and Parma manuscripts being larger and more calligraphic than that of his masoretic notes in Cod. Levy 19), it is evident that they were written by the same hand. Apart from the squarish dimension of the letters and the larger-than-average spacing between them, one may note several specific idiosyncrasies in Yehudah's square script which may be seen across all three manuscripts. These include the short, almost half-length roof of *pe*, the triangular *shin* with its short middle arm that usually does not touch the right arm, the slightly lengthened vertical downstroke of *gimel* which extends below the baseline, the relatively low point (touching the baseline) at which the right arm of *ẓade* joins its left arm, the inward angling of the two downstrokes in *heh* and *ḥet*, as well as the prominent upwards-pointing spur attached to the left downstroke of *ḥet*.

Other distinctive scribal practices employed by Yehudah in the London and Parma manuscripts include the use of a specific graphic filler at the end of the lines for the purpose of justification, which looks like the Arabic numeral '5' (Figs 3, 6a); a relatively strict approach to justification;

[22] There is no colophon in any of Yehudah haKohen's extant manuscripts; in this case, the date and locality are mentioned in a Ketubah template at the end of the manuscript (fol. 44^{v}). For Jewish settlement in Tienen (where a sizable Jewish community existed as early as the 1230s), see Cluse 2000, 20.

[23] The date may be inferred from a calendar (fols 16^{v}–18^{v}) which commences from the year 5066 (1305/6).

[24] For the geographical and social distribution of the two vernaculars in Brabant during this period see Croenen 2003, 110–111. The fact that some Jews residing in Dutch-speaking parts of Brabant spoke French is not surprising, considering their close ties to the French-speaking nobility, and the fact that many Brabantian Jews in the early-fourteenth century were recent immigrants from the French royal domain and England.

[25] See fols 21^{v} and 33^{v} in the Parma manuscript, and fols 1^{v}, 4^{r} 7^{r}, 7^{v}, 8^{r}, 12^{r}, 13^{v}, 16^{v}, 18^{v}, 21^{r}, 24^{r}, 25^{v}, 26^{v}, 31^{r}, 43^{r} in the London manuscript.

Fig. 3: London, British Library, Add MS 18424, fol. 1r, detail. © From the collections of the British Library.

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Fig. 4: Parma, Biblioteca Palatina MS 3518, fol. 21ᵛ, detail. © By permission of the Ministry of Culture, Complesso Monumentale della Pilotta, Biblioteca Palatina.

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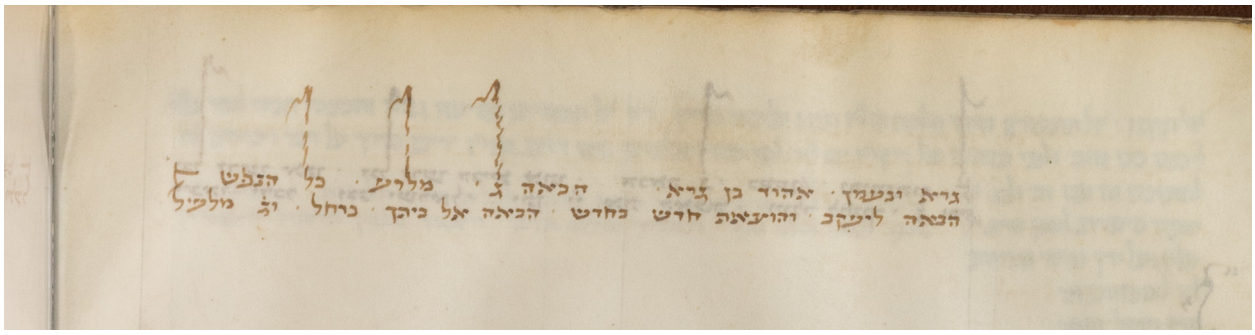

Fig. 5: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fol. 87ᵛ, detail. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

large gaps left between words; barely visible lines of ruling in lead point; and the placement of dots above catchwords. Yehudah's collaborator in these two manuscripts, on the other hand, did not indicate his name; he made no use of the 5-shaped line filler and his text blocks are less well-justified; his ruling lines, also in lead point, are consistently more visible and his catchwords are not decorated. Notable features of his handwriting include the more rounded shape of the top of *mem* and the bottom of *shin*, the shorter vertical downstroke of *gimel* which does not descend below the baseline, the longer roof of *pe*, the prominent flag at the top of *lamed*, and the generally tighter placement of letters (which often touch) and words. With respects to decoration, while both scribe-artists drew from the same, relatively limited decorative vocabulary (comprising round-arched doorways with trefoil-shaped pinnacles at the beginnings of the larger divisions, and straight chains of semi-abstract foliage for the smaller divisions), there is a discernible difference in competence and ambition. The doorways designed by Yehudah are constructed from blocks in alternating colours where quadrupedal animals are rendered in the spare-ground technique, and the doorways themselves vary significantly in shape, size and composition; all the doorways designed by his collaborator, on the other hand, are of a much humbler appearance, never exceeding the width of one column and almost always decorated only with foliage chains – the only exception being fol. 1ᵛ in the Parma manuscript (Fig. 7), where four quadrupeds in spare ground are drawn in a much less convincing way than those by Yehudah haKohen. There is a consistent difference even in the shade of the red pigment used by the two scribes: Yehudah uses a bright and intense red that is closer to coral, while the red used by his collaborator is duller. All these features indicate that the collaborator was less proficient than Yehudah haKohen both as scribe and as artist, and judging from the close stylistic dependence of his decorations on that of Yehudah, he was most likely a junior scribe who collaborated with Yehudah haKohen on a regular basis, perhaps Yehudah's apprentice.

I have also been able to identify another manuscript which was completed independently by Yehudah's collaborator, probably shortly after Parma MS 3518. Parma, Biblioteca Palatina MS 3517 is a copy of Isaac b. Joseph of Corbeil's *Sefer Miẓvot Katan*[26] (date and location of copying

[26] The *Sefer Miẓvot Katan* ('The Small Book of Commandments', acronym SeMaK) was written by Isaac b. Joseph of Corbeil in 1277, and was intended as an abridgement of the SeMaG. See Kaufmann 2019.

Fig. 6a: London, British Library, Add MS 18424, fol. 1r (Yehudah), upper part. © From the collections of the British Library.

Fig. 6b: London, British Library, Add MS 18424, fol. 38v (unnamed scribe) , upper part. © From the collections of the British Library.

unknown), the affinity of which to MS 3518 has already been noted in Richler's catalogue.[27] Here the handwriting is immediately identifiable as that of the collaborator; all other aspects of his scribal practice noted above can be observed here, and the three-column layout of this manuscript mirrors that of Add MS 18424 and Parma MS 3518. This manuscript contains two doorway decorations, which closely resemble his other work in style, though they are slightly more advanced technically: the quadrupedal animals are more shapely than his one-off attempt in Parma MS 3518 but still fall short of Yehudah's animals in neatness and fluency, while the few minor decorative elements unique to him in Parma MS 3518, including continuous scalloped borders around initial words and panels, and tendril-like double-line penwork flourishes intersecting at right angles that

[27] See Richler 2001, 179, 271–272.

form rectangular grids around the smaller initial words, are used more extensively and in a more developed way in Parma MS 3517 (Fig. 8). It is likely that MSS 3518 (prayer book) and 3517 (SeMaK) were commissioned at the same time and originally intended to be bound in the same codex; the less experienced scribe-artist first collaborated with Yehudah on the prayer book before going on to copy the entirety of the SeMaK by himself.

These three manuscripts allow some glimpses into the life and career of Yehudah haKohen in the years just before he copied the masorah magna in Cod. Levy 19. The Tienen connection of British Library, Add MS 18424 suggests that he was most likely based within the duchy of Brabant; he was apparently sufficiently experienced and well-respected as a scribe and artist to train someone else, and appears to have developed a specialism in large-dimension liturgical and halakhic books with a three-column layout. He was a moderately competent artist with a distinctive decorative vocabulary of semi-abstract Romanesque doorways, spare-ground animals, and borders composed of tiny circles or foliage chains in red and black. He had no scruples about depicting fully-human figures though he reserved these for illustrative rather than ornamental purposes, for a seder scene (Parma MS 3518, fol. 21^{r}) and for the *akedah*[28] (Parma MS 3518, fol. 25^{v}).[29]

The nature of Yehudah's involvement in this trio of manuscripts, as the main scribe-artist and possibly the master of an apprentice, forms a sharp contrast with his more secondary role as the masorete of Cod. Levy 19. The fact that he did not train or work primarily as a masorete may explain the fact that he only copied the masorah magna and not the masorah parva (since usually the same masorete would copy both), as well as his highly unusual choice of technique: I do not know of any other Ashkenazic manuscript from the same period where the *carmina figurata* technique, rather than micrography, is employed for the masorah magna, even though this technique is well-attested in the decoration of the Rashi column.[30]

One way of understanding Yehudah's decision to assume a more humble and less familiar role in the production of a manuscript would be by considering his outline drawings in Cod. Levy 19. While the figural motif favoured in his other manuscripts, the profile-view quadruped, also appears frequently in Cod. Levy 19 – although because of the *carmina figurata* format, the animals tend to

[28] The *akedah* (literally 'the binding') refers to depictions of the Sacrifice of Isaac.

[29] For an overview on the phenomenon of Jewish patrons and artists avoiding the depiction of fully-human figures, see Narkiss 1983. For more recent publications dealing with individual manuscripts see, for example, Buda 2006; Gertsman 2023.

[30] During this period, it was common for Ashkenazic scribes to copy the Rashi column in simple geometric shapes (especially symmetrical triangles and diamonds) which can be considered a rudimentary form of *carmina figurata*. For other examples from around the same period (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries) where the scribe practiced a more sophisticated form of *carmina figurata*, producing not only geometric designs but also figural forms and letters with the shape of the text blocks, see London, British Library, Add MS 26878 (France, *c.*1350–1400; Rashi column); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Michael 571 (German lands, *c.*1275–1300; Rashi column) and MS Oppenheim 14 (France, 1340; Rashi column). In all three cases, *carmina figurata* is applied to the Rashi column rather than the masorah magna section.
Paris, BnF, MS Hébreu 85 (eastern France, *c.*1275–1300) is an intermediary case where the format of the text decoration is halfway between micrography and *carmina figurata*: most of the lines of text of the masorah magna is written within pen-drawn outlines of images rather than functioning as the outline themselves (like in *carmina figurata*), but the letters change orientation and follow the contour of the pen-drawn outlines rather than remaining upright; they also do not fill all the space within the pen-drawn outlines (in these respects they are more similar to micrography). Therefore, I do not consider it a bona fide case of the *carmina figurata* technique being used for the masorah magna.

Figs 7 and 8: Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS 3518, fol. 1ᵛ; MS 3517, fol. 1ᵛ, details. © By permission of the Ministry of Culture, Complesso Monumentale della Pilotta, Biblioteca Palatina.

Figs 9a, 9b, 9c, 9d: Collated details from Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fols 4^{r}, 13^{v}, 199^{v}, 279^{r}, details. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

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Fig. 10: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fol. 144v, detail. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

have bulkier bodies and are usually not rendered in the spare ground technique – there are significant differences both in Yehudah's style and in his choice of motifs. In his other manuscripts, the human form is used only for narrative scenes and never as purely ornamental devices; in Cod. Levy 19, on the other hand, Yehudah's drawings frequently include decorative human heads, which are either standalone busts or attached to dragon-like bodies to form hybrids (Figs 9a–d, 10). This is accompanied by a stylistic change: while the human profiles drawn by Yehudah in the first 50 folios of Cod. Levy 19 are inconsistent in appearance, varying widely in the shape of their eyes, foreheads and noses (see Figs 9a, 9b),[31] the profiles become more standardised later in the manuscript, to the point of coalescing around one basic archetype (Figs 9c, 9d).[32] This archetype, with drop-shaped eyes, a bulging forehead, a pointy, beak-like nose and a prominent chin, is completely unlike Yehudah's profiles in his other manuscripts, and instead bears an unmistakable resemblance to the human profiles drawn by the main artist of Cod. Levy 19 (see lower right of Fig. 10). In fact, both the similarity in the construction and posture of the hybrids in Fig. 10, and the somewhat confused folds at the neck of Yehudah's hybrid (a motif he rarely employs elsewhere) at the top left of the image, suggests that Yehudah's hybrid was copied directly from the main artist's drawing on the same folio. More generally, Yehudah's attempt at stylistic assimilation is also seen in the more muscular forms of the animals with larger feet or claws, and in the abandonment of his characteristic double-line foliage chain design, which is shown in Fig. 11 below, taken from a relatively early point in the manuscript:

[31] Some of these profiles are reminiscent of Yehudah's human heads in MS Parma 3518, with their prominent noses and a square angle formed between the jaw and the neck.

[32] For further profile heads drawn by Yehudah see fols 11v, 14v, 19r, 21v, 37v, 65r–v, 66r, 71r, 192v, 202v, 209v, 219v.

Fig. 11: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fol. 14^{v}, detail. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

Fig. 12: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fol. 10^{r}, detail. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

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In Figure 11, along the upper border of the long horizontal panel, Yehudah's foliage chain with double outlines can be seen to dissolve gradually into the single-line swirls. While the double-line foliage chain along the lower border is not completely reduced to single-line swirls, we do witness the disappearance of the tiny leaves attached to the first two foliage scrolls. From this folio onwards, single-line swirls replace double-line foliage chains as Yehudah's default option for filling backgrounds or borders. Once again, the abandonment of an ornamental motif used so frequently in his other manuscripts seems connected to the fact that single-line swirls were the main artist's default background filler (Fig. 12). These attempts by Yehudah to imitate the work of the main artist, in particular the latter's minor penwork decorations for the smaller initial words in red ink, implies not only Yehudah's recognition of the main artist as his superior, but also that the main artist's minor penwork decorations for the smaller initial words were probably added before the masorah magna. The fully-painted initial word pages for the larger textual divisions, on the other hand, were added by the main artist after the masorah magna, as demonstrated by instances where the panel designs are adapted according to the shape of the masorah magna (see the slight indentation to the bottom of the panel at fol. 509^{v}, where the red ink also goes above one of Yehudah's letters).

To sum up, the order of work is as follows:

I. Consonantal Text (Hebrew and Aramaic): Iẓḥak b. Eliahu
II. Vocalisation and corrections: Vocalisers A and B
III. Further corrections: artist/corrector
IV. Masorah parva: Masorete C
V. Rashi's Commentary: Iẓḥak b. Eliahu
VI. Penwork decoration (minor textual divisions): artist/corrector
VII. Masorah magna with penwork decoration: Yehudah haKohen
VIII. Painted decoration (major textual divisions): artist/corrector

It is unclear whether Yehudah's altered approach in his penwork decorations for Cod. Levy 19 was the result of him entering a formal apprenticeship with the main artist; another possibility would be that he only did so in order to give the manuscript a more homogenous appearance. The fact that most of the changes occurred as he was decorating the book and not before it, suggests that Cod. Levy 19 was probably the first project on which Yehudah collaborated with the main artist; but it cannot be known whether they continued to collaborate, since no other surviving manuscript by either of these artists is known to me. But we can safely rule out the possibility that Yehudah would revert entirely to his earlier style after this project; he appears to have learned from the main artist a more consistent, vigorous and expressive way of drawing, and it seems improbable that he would be willing (or indeed able) to unlearn it afterwards.

3. Iẓḥak the Scribe and *akud hamor*

As already mentioned, the main artist of Cod. Levy 19 was responsible not only for decoration, but also for correcting the text and recording the total number of letters, words and verses in each biblical book – for the latter two tasks, he employed a small but statuesque square script with minimal shading. In the same script he left his own rhymed colophon beneath that of Iẓḥak the Scribe and a drawing of a seated man on the manuscript's final folio (fol. 625[r]), where he gives his own name as 'the Bound of Mor' (*akud hamor*; עקוד המר), a well-attested circumlocution for the name Iẓḥak.[33]

הנני עקוד המר אודה אדון עולם נתן בלבי בין לעשות מלאכה דא
ציור והכתיבה שילמתי יחד בזמן אשר מנוי כים בטב גדא
יירש וגם יהגה בו איש אשר הכתיב נקרא ר׳ חיים יחיה בלי טרדא
כל איש אשר יראה זה יהיה חפץ יהנה לשנות בו מן כל כלי חמדה
לכבוד יקר אלוהי תורה ולקח טוב פעלתי יופי כן היא בלימודה
פועלה הלא יחיש ישע לנהלנו בעגל בעיר שלם ישבה כגלמודה

Here I am, the Bound of Mor, I thank the Lord of the Universe,
who gave to my heart the understanding to do this work,
The drawing and the writing I completed together,
By the time which was appointed, with good luck.
He will take possession of it and also meditate upon it, the man who had [this book] written,
who is called Rabbi Ḥayyim, may he live without trouble!
Every person who will see this will be delighted,
And will have [more] pleasure to study it than any precious vessel,
To the glory of my dear God, the Torah and good instruction,
I have made a beautiful thing, indeed it is, in its teaching,
Those who work on it will surely hasten deliverance to lead us
Speedily to Jerusalem [who] sits like a solitary woman.

Since the artist mentions having completed both the drawing and the writing (which may refer either only to the corrections or also to the copying of the book itself), it is natural to ask whether this Iẓḥak was the same as the main scribe of the manuscript; scholars who worked on this manuscript have stated either that the main artist was the same person as Iẓḥak the Scribe, or that he was the same person as Yehudah haKohen (a suggestion that we can easily dismiss on the basis of the script), or that he was a different person from both of the above, without elaborating on how they arrived at these conclusions.[34] In this section, I will try to reach my own conclusions on this matter by closely comparing the scripts and scribal practices of Iẓḥak the Scribe with that of the artist-corrector, *akud hamor*.

[33] On the interpretation of this name and its parallels in *piyyutim*, see Shalev-Eyni 2020, paragraphs 4–5 (no page number).

[34] For the first suggestion see Wandrey 2014; for the second suggestion see Zirlin 2015, 30; for the third suggestion see Shalev-Eyni 2020.

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Fig. 13: Collated alphabet showing the handwritings of Iẓḥak the Scribe (upper rows) and *akud hamor* (lower rows).

From the perspective of the script, there are many similarities between the more calligraphic script of Iẓḥak the Scribe and the smaller and less formal script of *akud hamor*: these include the flattened shape of *alef* with its slightly wavy oblique stroke, the broad roof of *pe*, the almost-vertical left arm of *shin*, and the symmetrical bifurcation at the bottom of *gimel* where the main stem turns right from the point where it is joined with the left-hand stroke. Some differences in the shape of the strokes – such as the exaggerated zigzag of the vertical strokes in *bet*, *mem*, *nun*, *pe* and the left-hand downstroke in *tav* – may be partly explained by the lack of shading in *akud hamor*'s script, which makes the turning of the nib more conspicuous. The greatest difference between the two scripts is in the orientation of vertical downstrokes in the letters *dalet*, *heh*, *ḥet*, *resh* and *tav*: in *akud hamor*'s script this downstroke angles inwards, while in Iẓḥak the Scribe's script it is angled outwards, forming parallels with the other downstroke in *heh*. This can potentially also be explained by the difference in the nib and the register of script, since in *akud hamor*'s script it is the vertical rather than the horizontal strokes that are made with the full width of the nib, and the vertical strokes in question were most likely traced in the same movement as the preceding horizontal stroke (while in Iẓḥak's square script the two strokes are traced separately) – both of these factors may have made it easier to form a sharp rather than blunt angle between the upper horizontal bar and the right hand downstroke. But one may argue that this very difference in the orientation of the nib indicates two different scribes, and the paleographical comparison remains ultimately inconclusive.

A slightly clearer picture emerges when one compares the use of justification devices by the two hands.

In the longer corrections by *akud hamor* where he supplies verses omitted by Iẓḥak the Scribe, his decision to justify the left margin is itself unusual; Vocalisers A and B, in their longer corrections, do not make any effort at all. In addition to lengthening and compressing the final letters, and cancelling out half-written words with small, diagonal superscript dashes, *akud hamor* would sometimes employ a space filler that is shaped like a narrow number 7 (left half of Fig. 14); the corner between the shorter horizontal head and the longer downstroke is sometimes sharp

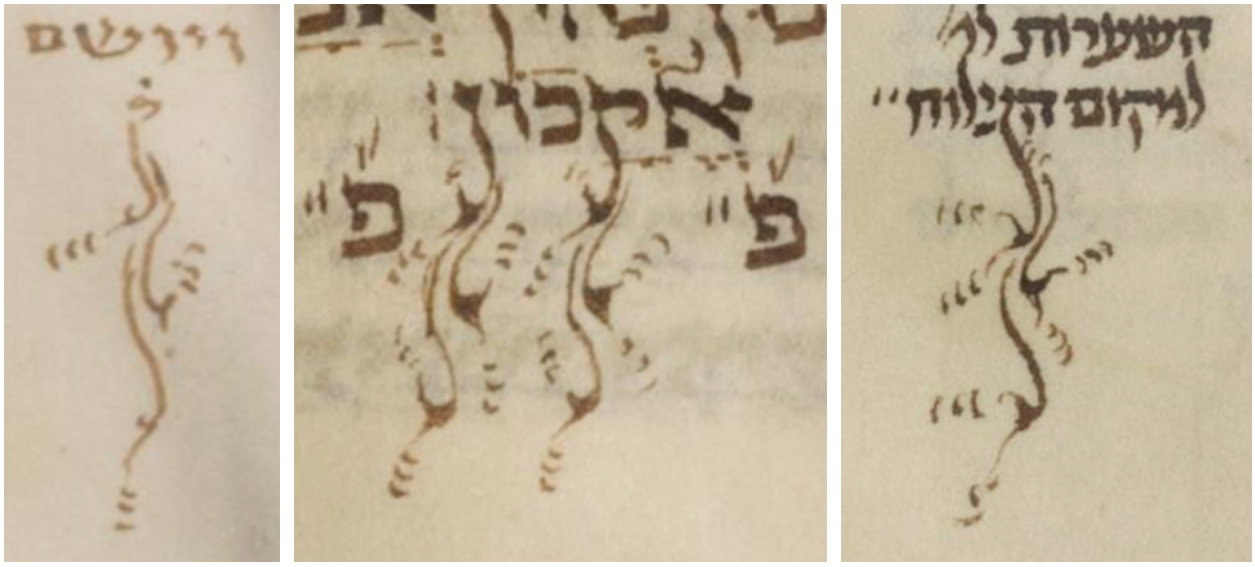
Fig. 14: Collated details from Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fols 78ᵛ, 174ʳ. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

and sometimes rounded. The same 7-shaped space filler is used, with a similar range of variation in size and proportion, by Iẓḥak the Scribe in the two central columns (right half of Fig. 14); for the Rashi column, the 7-shapes consistently have rounded corners, in accordance with the more rounded character of the semi-square script itself. The 7-shaped space filler is by no means a common justification device used in conjunction with calligraphic square scripts: for this purpose, Ashkenazic scribes of the period generally preferred a slightly more complex symbol consisting of an upper horizontal part traced with a thick stroke, and a lower part with some degree of curvature and shading (resulting in shapes that loosely resemble, for example, the letters *zayn* and *kof*, or the number 5 like Yehudah's preferred space filler, see above); Iẓḥak's space filler, with a short upper horizontal bar and an extremely simple lower part consisting only of a straight hairline stroke, bears a closer resemblance to space fillers sometimes used in conjunction with smaller, semi-square scripts.[35] The highly atypical use of the 7-shaped space filler with the square script by both Iẓḥak and *akud hamor* indicates that the two were probably the same person.

A comparison of the penwork flourishes that appear alongside the two scripts confirms my preliminary conclusion. At the bottom of both the two central columns (usually at the end of a textual unit) and the Rashi column, the descenders of certain letters are often lengthened and given ornamental treatment: to the ends of the descenders are added small forks like swallows' tails, and the same sequence of s-shaped curves followed by forks are repeated, each branching off in the opposite direction from the previous. The tips of the curves are further embellished with tiny groups of three brackets (Figs 15b, 15c).[36] The same sequence of curves decorate some of the

[35] For a few examples of the 7-shaped space fillers used in conjunction with semi-square script, see Paris, BnF, MS Hébreu 37; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Arch. Selden A. 7.

[36] These flourishes may be found, for example, at fols 16ʳ, 35ʳ, 37ʳ, 40ᵛ, 44ʳ, 44ᵛ, 48ᵛ, 58ʳ, 59ᵛ, 68ᵛ, 75ʳ, 87ʳ, 88ʳ, 91ʳ, 93ᵛ, 108ʳ, 116ᵛ, 121ʳ, 125ᵛ, 128ᵛ, 131ᵛ, 132ʳ, 138ᵛ, 157ᵛ, 166ᵛ, 168ʳ, 185ᵛ, 187ᵛ, 193ᵛ, 198ᵛ, 199ᵛ, 201ᵛ, 206ʳ, 206ᵛ, 218ʳ, 223ʳ, 237ᵛ, 252ᵛ, 258ᵛ, 290ᵛ, 306ᵛ, 320ᵛ, 358ᵛ, 388ʳ, 416ʳ, 591ʳ, 608ʳ (the list is inexhaustive).



Figs 15a, 15b, 15c: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fols 39^{r}, 202^{v}, 206^{r}, details. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

Figs 16a, 16b, 16c: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fols 229^{v}, 415^{r}, 512^{r}, details. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

Figs 17a, 17b: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fols 25^{v}, 208^{v}, details. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

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Figs 18a, 18b: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fols 312r, 615r, details. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

descenders in *akud hamor*'s corrections and notes (Fig. 15a); here the only difference is that the forks are not as heavily-inked, which would presumably have been more difficult to achieve with a much thinner nib.[37]

Another penwork flourish that is related to the forked descender is the swirl motif. The motif appears to have been invented by Iẓḥak as a variant version of the forked descender (Fig. 16a), where the tips of the forks are extended and form swirls. Later the same swirls are employed by *akud hamor* in his corrections (Fig. 16b); still later in the production process, the swirls are used much more liberally by Iẓḥak as decorations to the Rashi column (Fig. 16c), where they evolve into more sophisticated variations on the forked descender motif where the swirls, rather than simply replacing the groups of three brackets, are used in combination with them.[38]

Chronologically speaking, *akud hamor*'s penwork decoration around the smaller initial words immediately follows the copying of the Rashi column, and here we see the swirl motif being used as a background filler for the first time (Figs 17a, 17b). But despite its new function, and the fact that from this point onwards red pigment is often used instead of brown ink, some continuity from its earlier usage is maintained: in some of the initial word panels within the first half of the Pentateuch proper, groups of three brackets still punctuate the curved lines linking the swirls (Fig. 17a). But these are gradually abandoned, and the resulting simplified network of swirls is later used as the standard background filler in the painted initial word panels. The prevalence

[37] Further examples by *akud hamor* are on fols 96v, 194v, 529v, 545v, 581v, 594v.

[38] Further instances of swirls being used to decorate the Rashi column may be found at fols 210r, 246v, 250r, 251v, 269r, 280v, 283v, 294r, 358v, 378r, 391r, 411r, 413v, 416r, 420r, 423v, 441r, 452r, 468r, 483r, 493r, 500r, 512r, 525r, 525v, 531r, 532r, 534r, 543v, 548v, 562v, 563v, 602r, 611v, 619v, 620r, 622v, 624r.

of the swirl motif in the decorative vocabulary of both Iẓḥak and *akud hamor*, and the sense of continuous development throughout the production process as a simple penwork flourish is gradually reinvented as background decoration, would be difficult to explain if the two scribes were different people.

Though it may not be necessary to give any further proofs that *akud hamor* was the same person as Iẓḥak the Scribe, there is one more phenomenon that is relevant to my discussion: in the Rashi column, there are occasional foliate penwork decorations in the style of *akud hamor* that are simply executed in brown ink (Figs 18a, 18b; see also fols 280^{r}, 324$^{r–v}$). Most of these embellish the end of columns, and do not appear to mark out specific parts of the commentary itself; the only exception is fol. 615^{r} (Fig. 18b), where the foliage (most of which has subsequently been trimmed away) is grafted onto one specific line of the commentary: here Rashi glosses Job 28:12, explaining the word 'והחכמה' ('[and the] wisdom') simply as 'תורה' ('Torah'). Presumably, as he approached the end of his task as a copyist, Iẓḥak made the spontaneous decision to highlight this equation of wisdom with Torah (conveniently situated at the end of a line) for his patron, anticipating similar recommendations in his colophons only ten folios later.

4. Iẓḥak the Artist

The equation of *akud hamor* with the scribe Iẓḥak b. Eliahu means that in the case of Cod. Levy 19, we are dealing with a Jewish scribe-artist in the truest sense: that is to say, someone who was equally skilled in calligraphy, drawing and painting. The remainder of this article re-evaluates Iẓḥak's work as an artist in light of my recent conclusions on his role in the production process.

Iẓḥak b. Eliahu worked primarily on the painted panels at the beginnings (and occasionally also ends) of books, but he was also responsible for several (mostly marginal) text-illustrations, the red-and-black penwork decoration around the initial words of the *parashiyot* and *haftarot*, as well as a small number of drawings (mostly dragons and foliage) around the Rashi column or on the lower margin.[39] Of these four categories of decoration, the latter two are done in red and brown penwork at an earlier stage of the production process, before the masorah magna was added; the former two are executed last, in light washes of colour with strong outlines in brown ink – the palette is a relatively subdued one of vermilion, brown, teal and golden yellow.

The first category of decoration can be further separated into extended panels at the beginnings of the biblical books, where all the spaces within the written area that are not occupied by writing are filled with ornamental blocks and strips (fols 2^{r}, 97^{r}, 182^{r}, 242^{v}, 326^{r}, 403^{r}, 479^{r}, 489^{r}, 509^{v}, 536^{v}, 549^{r}, 601^{r}); smaller, column-width panels that fill blank spaces at the end of two of the Five Scrolls (fols 488^{v}, 600^{v}); three full-page miniatures that head the three main divisions of the manuscript (fols 1^{v}, 402^{v}, 478^{v}) and a colophon page at the end (fol. 625^{r}). With only two exceptions (Samson

[39] The *bas-de-page* decorations may be found on fols 34^{v} (*akedah*), 49^{r} (Jacob's dream), 146^{r} (menorah), 274^{r} (spies sent to the land of Canaan), 469^{r} (Jonah and the fish), 600^{v} (Job covered by sores). For the incidental drawing see, for example, the foliage bundles around the Rashi column on fols 263^{r} and 312^{r}, and two small drawings of dragons on the bottom margin at fols 252^{v} (end of quire), 529^{r}. On the interpretation of the dragon at fol. 529^{r}, which is accompanied by the only Latin-alphabet word in this manuscript, see Pan 2024.

wrestling with the lion at the beginning of the *haftarot* (fol. 402^{v}), and Job covered with sores at the beginning of Job (fol. 600^{v})), this first category of decoration does not include illustrations of the text – instead they feature different kinds of foliage chains, architectural frames, birds, beasts, dragons, hybrids which range from the simple and well-known (such as the siren, the centaur, the wild man and the human-headed reptile) to obscure composite creatures that were doubtlessly invented by Iẓḥak himself, as well as a male, unbearded human figure that is decidedly non-biblical in his clothing and posture. He wears a golden-yellow knee-length tunic that falls in generous folds, and a knotted hood in the matching colour.[40] On the colophon page, he sits in an ornate chair among roses, cradles a Talbot hound (a common hunting breed) and faces a seated monkey, an expensive and exotic pet popular among prelates and the aristocracy in medieval northern Europe (Fig. 19b);[41] at the beginning of the *haftarot* section, he is used rather irreverently as a caryatid figure supporting one of the four columns of the architectural frame (Fig. 19a). While there is nothing extraordinary about the figure's tunic (very similar yellow tunics paired with teal stockings are worn by some of the biblical figures painted on the margins, including Abraham on fol. 34^{v}, one of the spies to the land of Canaan on fol. 274^{r} and the half-mauled Jonah on fol. 469^{r}) or the well-coordinated colour scheme of his clothing (which is the inevitable result of a limited palette), his distinctive way of wearing the hood, which was newly in fashion in the early-1300s and does not appear elsewhere in this manuscript (though many other human figures and hybrids wear their hoods the normal way), in combination with the fact that he is the only fully-human, and not obviously biblical figure to be represented (excluding the hair-covered wild man in the initial word panel to Deuteronomy on fol. 326^{r}, which is arguably not fully human) suggests that this young man most likely represents someone contemporaneous to the making of the manuscript, perhaps the patron Ḥayyim b. Ḥayyim.[42]

But the putative portrait of the patron is not the only instance of a distinctive set of human features that recur in this manuscript. The other instance does not involve the full figure of a person, but only a head which is attached to the gutter on one occasion (Fig. 20a), and to a foliate border on the other (Fig. 20b). While human heads, attached either to border bars or to non-human bodies, frequently decorate the full-page initial word panels, the vast majority of those (according to my count, 60 out of 68) are beardless male heads; bearded male heads (5/68) and female heads (3/68) are significantly rarer by comparison. With regards to hairstyle, the majority of the male heads have covered heads (22/65), closely-cropped curly hair (24/65) or no hair at all (13/65), and only a few have medium-length hair of various textures (4/65), or long wavy hair (2/65). This

[40] The practice of wearing the face opening of a hood around the head, and with the shoulder cape knotted on top of the head, began to be fashionable among men from around 1300 onwards – a hood worn in this manner is also called a chaperon; see Thursfield 2012. A very similar depiction of the chaperon (with even the same colour scheme), contemporary to Cod. Levy 19, is found at fol. 55^{v} of the Pabenham-Clifford Hours (England, *c.*1310–1320; Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 242); here the wimpled head wearing the hood is exceedingly large, not attached to a body, and placed among other monstrous figures. Wimples were worn only by women, and the chaperon only by men – the juxtaposition of these two differently-gendered headgears appears to provide the main visual gag in this image. The different methods of wearing a hood represented in Cod. Levy 19 are described briefly in Metzger and Metzger 1982, 116.

[41] Walker-Meikle 2012, 13, 43.

[42] Beit-Arié 2021, 134.

Fig. 19a: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fol. 403r. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

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Fig. 19b: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fol. 625ʳ. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

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means that the combination of thick, voluminous curly hair and long, wavy beard as seen on the human heads in Figs. 20a and 20b are by no means customary; also considering the placement of the head just above the words 'אני יצחק' ('I am Iẓḥak') in the colophon, it is tempting to read this specific human head as a self-portrait of the scribe-artist, Iẓḥak b. Eliahu, whose placement of his own likeness above his name turns the words 'אני יצחק' into a caption of sorts. The other occurrence of this bearded head is situated within the final *parashah* (*parashat pekudei*) of Exodus, at the end of a closed portion (*parashah setumah*) which is indicated, as usual, with a line break. In this case, the bearded head serves to indicate the beginning of the optional *parashah (parashat vatekhel)*, the second half of *parashat pekudei* which was read as a separate *parashah* in leap years by some Jewish communities in England and northeastern France.[43]

The preceding overview of the content and distribution of Iẓḥak b. Eliahu's drawings and paintings reveals a different side of his personality from my examination of his work as a scribe. While rigorous and highly attentive in his approach to the text, Iẓḥak b. Eliahu in his role as an illuminator is inventive, expressive and at times even mischievous – unlike other Jewish patrons and makers of manuscripts in Ashkenaz during this period, he also shows a remarkable degree of latitude when it comes to the depiction of humans, his repertoire encompassing not only full-length human figures but also half-naked torsos of men and women (see the sirens at fol. 549^{r}) and disturbing images such as the seated Job, fully-naked, covered in bleeding sores with hideously warped fingers (fol. 600^{v})[44]. But the truest demonstration of Iẓḥak's ingenuity as an artist is found not in the subject matter of his drawings (which is to a large extent shared with other illuminated liturgical pentateuch manuscripts as well as illuminated Psalters and Books of Hours for Christian use), but in his style which is unique. A thorough examination of Iẓḥak's style, including an account of possible channels of influence, lies beyond the scope of this present study and should be dealt with in a separate article; but to give a succinct introduction to it, and thereby to complete the picture of the relationship between Iẓḥak and his fellow scribe-artist Yehudah haKohen, I offer the following comparison of the same scene, the *akedah* (the Sacrifice of Isaac), depicted by Yehudah haKohen in MS Parm 3518 and by Iẓḥak b. Eliahu in Cod. Levy 19.

While from an iconographical point of view, the comparison above reveals both similarities (including the basket of burning coals below Isaac, the wings of the angel, the hood and tunic worn by Abraham alongside the knife he holds, and the ornamental foliage in which the horns of the ram are entangled) and differences (which include the halo around the head of the angel, the nakedness of Isaac, and the prayer shawl worn by Abraham in Cod. Levy 19), the two images have little in common stylistically. While Yehudah's figures are each enclosed within rectangular or pseudo-rectangular colour blocks, which are part of a larger assemblage of red and black spare-ground colour blocks around an enlarged initial word, the image in Cod. Levy 19 is placed at the *bas-de-page*, a space not utilised by Yehudah haKohen and his assistant in the London and Parma

[43] For this liturgical and scribal phenomenon, where *parashat vatekhel* was often marked out in some way without being highlighted in the same way as the other *parashiyot* in biblical manuscripts, see Steimann 2025, 16–23.

[44] See footnote 26. For a similar depiction of the ailing Job at the start of this biblical book, see Wroclaw, Ossolineum Pawlikowski Collection, Coll. 141 (northeastern France, *c.*1300), p. 798.

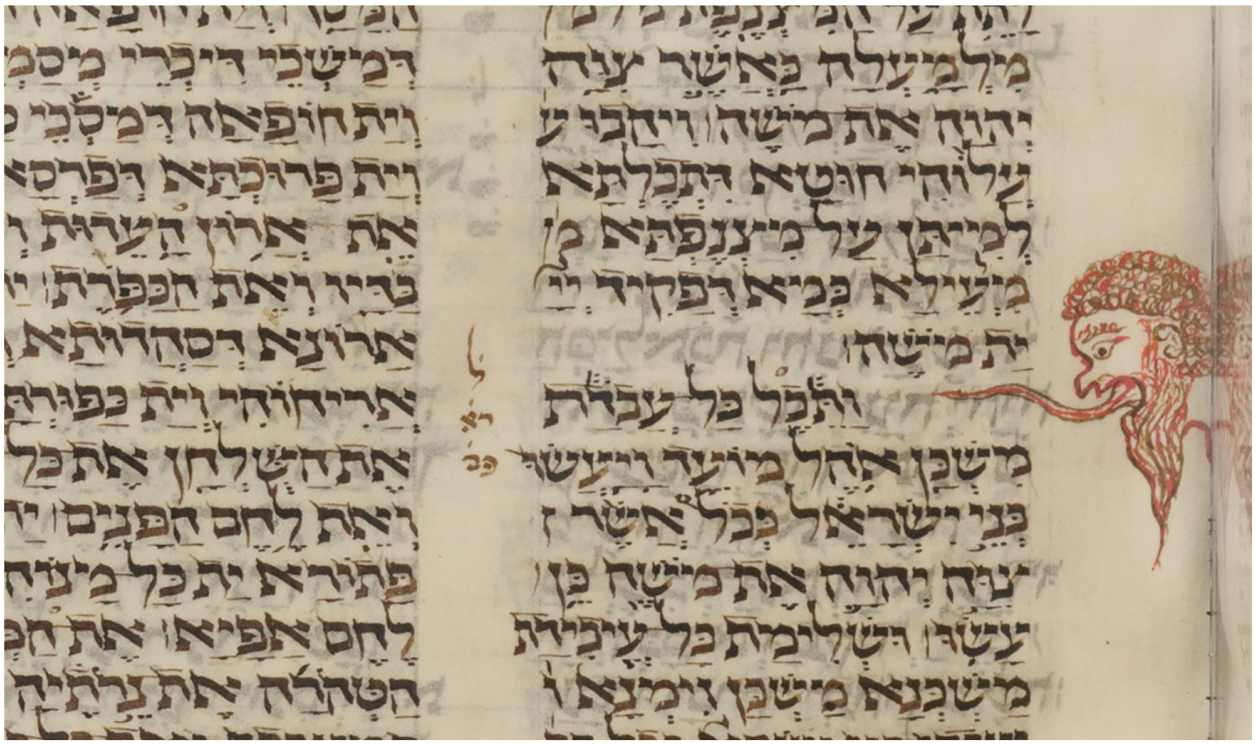

Fig. 20a: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fol. 179r, detail. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

Fig. 20b: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fol. 625r, detail. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

manuscripts. Quite the opposite of each being enclosed in its own box, Iẓḥak's figures are enmeshed in a complex network of physical interactions: Isaac lying directly on the basket of burning coals; Abraham grasping Isaac by his hair and wielding a knife in his other hand; the angel holding the knife with one hand and touching the horn of the ram with the other; the ram overlapping with a part of Abraham's tunic and leg; the foliage entangled both with the ram's horns and with the angel's hand. This element of the visual labyrinth is a distinguishing feature of Iẓḥak's style, and receives an even fuller expression in his arrangement of foliage scrolls where tendrils endlessly weave in and out of each other (see for example fols 242v, 488v); while it is to some extent made possible by his pen-and-wash technique and his somewhat larger palette compared to Yehudah's –

which allows overlapping subjects to be better differentiated by means of colour – the fundamental skill that such visual labyrinths require is the ability to conceive of complex scenes as a whole, rather than as being composed of separate parts. Indeed, like a seamless cloak, it is difficult to determine the order in which Iẓḥak drew the figures in the *akedah* scene: the figures are joined to each other in a way that is as natural and coherent as individual limbs on a single body.

With regards to figure style, it is easy to see the difference between Yehudah's figures with their poorly-defined hands and feet, the rather inconsistent profiles with their unusually prominent noses, the extremely restricted repertoire of arm postures and the stiff lines of the drapery folds and their counterparts in Fig. 22, which have crisply-drawn hands and feet with long fingers and toes, striking profiles with gently-curved eyebrows, large drop-shaped eyes with tiny and centrally-placed pupils, pointy and slightly-beak-like noses, small mouths indicated with double lines and protruding chins, supple and shapely limbs which are arranged into a wide array of poses, and drapery folds indicated with strong and sinuous lines. While decidedly more stylised and two-dimensional than naturalistic (to such an extent that one art historian called the style 'naïve'), the remarkable consistency in Iẓḥak's figure style is indicative of an extremely steady hand and a highly crystallised artistic sensibility.[45]

The nature of the collaboration between Iẓḥak and Yehudah is made clearer by the comparison above. While the two artists share a repertoire of decorative forms that include foliage chains, animals, hybrids and human figures that illustrate the text, they differ fundamentally in style, technique and level of proficiency. Yehudah was a moderately able artist who had a relatively restricted vocabulary of spare-ground doorway panels which he executed in black and red; Iẓḥak juggled a larger palette (including yellow and teal in addition to red and brown ink) and an even larger panoply of panel designs, made use of the spare-ground technique in combination with the reverse technique where the subjects are coloured against an unpainted background, and had a degree of freedom and ease with his medium that is characteristic only of the most gifted illuminators. By participating in the production of Cod. Levy 19, Yehudah haKohen was most likely exposed to an approach to manuscript illumination that was new to him; that it also made an impression on him is clear from the changes in his own style discussed above. Rather than being members of the same small community in Brussels (in which case one would expect to see more similarities between their styles), Yehudah and Iẓḥak most likely trained in different locations; considering the fact that Cod. Levy 19 was completed in Brussels, and that Yehudah's only other localised manuscript was probably made in Tienen, it is tempting to speculate that Yehudah may have been from Tienen, and that the meeting between Iẓḥak and Yehudah may have been one between a 'cosmopolitan' and a 'provincial' artist, but there is, for the time being, no further evidence to strengthen this claim.[46]

[45] On the comment on the naïveté of Iẓḥak's style, see Zirlin 2015.

[46] Considering the fact that Tienen was one of the cities and towns in Brabant where the persecution of Jews was particularly intense during the 'Crusade of the Poor' in the spring and summer of 1309, and the only Brabantian town where a ritual murder allegation was made at around this time (in 1308), it would have made sense for Yehudah to take refuge in a nearby city in 1308/09 (a decision taken by some Brabantian Jews as recorded by chroniclers), assuming he had been residing in Tienen. See Cluse 2000, 192–210.

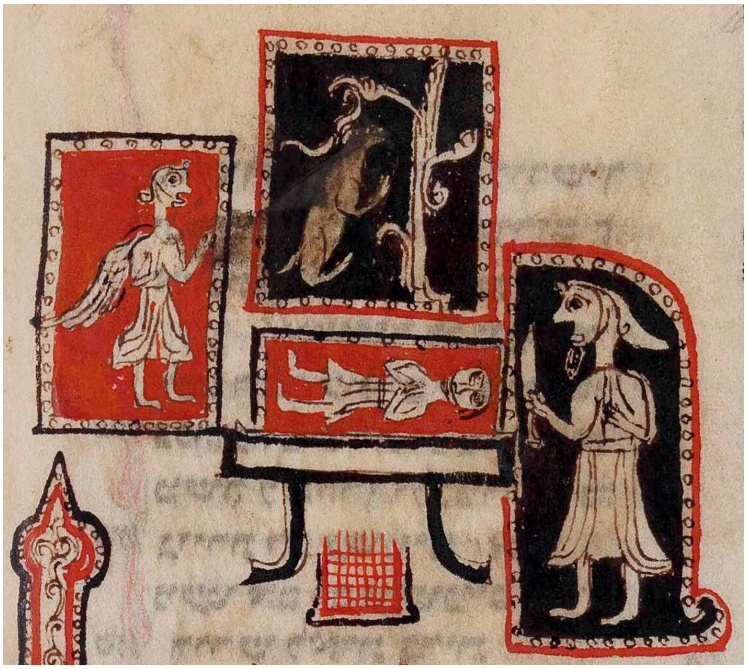

Fig. 21: Parma, Biblioteca Palatina MS 3518, fol. 25ᵛ, detail. © By permission of the Ministry of Culture, Complesso Monumentale della Pilotta, Biblioteca Palatina.

Fig. 22: Hamburg, Universitäts- und Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Levy 19, fol. 34ᵛ, detail. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

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5. Conclusion

We can conclude that Cod. Levy 19 was the result of a rather uneven collaboration involving five scribes: two unnamed vocalisers, one unnamed masorete, and two named scribe-artists, Yehudah haKohen and Iẓḥak b. Eliahu. Yehudah's involvement in the production of three other surviving manuscripts situates him firmly in a milieu of French-speaking Jews in the Duchy of Brabant, and the fact that he worked alongside an apprentice-like collaborator strongly suggests that Yehudah was already a confident and prolific scribe-artist a few years before Cod. Levy 19 was copied. While no other manuscript copied or decorated by Iẓḥak b. Eliahu is known, both Yehudah's acceptance of a secondary and unaccustomed role as masorete in Cod. Levy 19 and his visible attempt to emulate Iẓḥak's style in his drawings suggest that Yehudah recognised Iẓḥak as his superior in both copying and painting; indeed, Iẓḥak's high degree of technical mastery as both scribe and illuminator leaves it out of the question that he did not copy and decorate other manuscripts. But it seems premature to complain about the absence of further manuscripts decorated by Iẓḥak, when so much still remains to be explored within Cod. Levy 19 itself.

List of Manuscripts

Amsterdam, Jewish Historical Museum
‘Amsterdam Mahzor’ (no shelfmark)

Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum
MS 242

Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana
MS Plut.3.3

Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek
Cod. Levy 19

Jerusalem, National Library of Israel
MS Heb. 4o781/1

Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal
MS 72

London, British Library
Add MS 18424
Add MS 26878

Oxford, Bodleian Library
MS Arch. Selden A.5
MS Arch. Selden A. 7
MS Kennicott 1
MS Kennicott 3
MS Michael 571
MS Oppenheim 14

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France
MS Hébreu 4
MS Hébreu 37
MS Hébreu 85
MS Hébreu 643

Parma, La Biblioteca Palatina
MS 3517
MS 3518

Wroclaw, Ossolineum Pawlikowski Collection
Coll. 141

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