Foreword

For more than 400 years, the *Nuremberg Miscellany* awaited its due recognition as a masterpiece of Jewish visual culture. Its unassuming format, simple cardboard secondary binding, and naïvely executed illustrations attracted little attention from scholars, though certainly not enough for anyone to dedicate an entire monograph to its iconographically rich, often enigmatic illustrations. Something about it, perhaps its modesty, struck a chord in my heart nearly thirty-five years ago. It was love-at-first-sight, which matured and ripened along the years until the time has come for its realisation. Little did I know then what I have recently discovered: that the progenitor of the family of proprietors of the *Nuremberg Miscellany*, Eli'ezer Abraham, father of Simeon and of Jacob of the Günzburg family, born in 1477 in Porto, in the Veneto region of Italy, was my fourteenth great-grandfather!

As a child, I often visited the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem, the forerunner of the present Israel Museum. One particular object on display aroused my curiosity. It was a pink sandstone slab, carved and decorated with an eight-pointed star, two cornucopia and several Hebrew letters in relief. Its caption read "marriage stone" from Bingen on the Rhine, dated 1700, and the brief comment explained that in that region it was customary for the bridegroom to shatter the glass against such a "marriage stone" as part of the wedding ceremony (see Figure 1).[1]

Figure 1: *Ḥuppah* stone (*Traustein*), Bingen (Germany), 1700 [Jerusalem, The Israel Museum, 199/022; B66.09.1409, Gift of the Bingen Municipality through the Jewish community of Cologne, Germany] (Photo by Elie Posner)

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The stone from Bingen am Rhein was included in the exhibition "Monumenta Judaica: 2000 Jahre Geschichte und Kultur der Juden am Rhein," shown in Cologne in 1963–1964. The brief catalogue entry no. E154 sheds little light on the unique custom pertaining to this stone.

In the mid-1980s, I finally began to decipher this enigma thanks to a text—rather than an illustration—in the *Nuremberg Miscellany*. In the manuscript, I found the clue to the exhibit that had perplexed me since my childhood. As an art-historian, I was more inclined to look for visual clues. Finding a textual allusion for a visual-physical artefact led me to focus my research on cultural history.

With this perspective in mind, I ventured into the process of unraveling the cognitive iconographic creative process of the *Nuremberg Miscellany*'s artist. The challenge was to enter the secret of his inner world. After the obvious steps of studying the apparently clear questions, namely *what* is the object of our observation and *who* are the protagonists, a third question emerged, namely *why* the artist inserted a particular image in a certain composition and specific iconography within the complete decorative scheme. This last question proved to be not only exceptionally rewarding but also a challenging and intriguing one in this journey. It necessitated an in-depth examination of the text-image relationship of each individual image and a probe into the pattern of associations between the verbal and the visual throughout the manuscript. Often, I was under the impression that the artist's choices of visual material drew more on his inner cultural world than on Jewish textual tradition in general and the manuscript's text in particular.

The artist of the *Nuremberg Miscellany* was by no means a passive player deferring to a patron and relying on model books for his visual vocabulary; he followed his eyes, knowledge, and original phantasy alone. This was an extraordinary task in my attempt to interpret the images, their iconographic reading, and, furthermore—their social, religious, and cultural context.

Delving into every image in the manuscript, layer after layer of insight emerged, leading to a clearer understanding of the artist's mind. This process of deciphering was by far the most gratifying aspect of the excursion through the *Miscellany*. Over the course of time, it became clear that the most imperative task was to become acquainted with the artist and his cultural milieu. In the process of revealing him as an artist and an educated person, his breadth of knowledge, both as a man-of-the-world and as a literate Jew, his rich associative universe, and even his refined sense of humour became more and more apparent. Penetrating the inner world of this amazingly multifarious man was the greatest reward of this research.

Consequently, sharing this journey of exploration among the images became more important than treating the manuscript monolithically. The purpose of the analysis was to retrace the artist's cognitive-conceptual process, which resulted in this visual and iconographic wealth intertwined with wisdom and wit.

My love for this manuscript would not have been possible without the spirit of my late grandfather, Dr. Heinrich Feuchtwanger. A dentist and a true lover of Jewish art and visual culture, he, along with a group of other professionals and enthusiasts, passionately collected and documented, in the 1920s and 1930s, relics of the Jewish past in Southern Germany. Together they searched for these visual remnants in the then already desolate small Jewish communities, shovelling through the dust of ages in their synagogue attics, and recording, photographing, drawing, and measuring every cherished memento. To them these were living remains, testimonials of the rural communities that had once flourished in Bavaria, Swabia, and other extinct places of Jewish settlement. Some of the artefacts eventually ended up in my grandfather's Judaica collection, the largest of its kind at the time. Others found their way, through his agency, to the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem, including the Bingen marriage stone.

The backdrop of my childhood was one overflowing with artefacts of Jewish tradition. My grandparents' home in Jerusalem was replete with Jewish ritual objects and adornments of Jewish folk art. Cabinets lined the walls displaying articles made of silver and parchment, glass and clay, tin and fine fabrics. Many of them were very valuable, but their real importance lay in the stories behind them and their provenance. It was quite normal for my grandfather to use an eighteenth-century *kiddush* goblet to welcome Shabbat, or for me to sit on a circumcision bench from his collection. Both—like hundreds of other relics—enjoyed love and reverence in the home of Heini (Heinrich) and Henni (Henriette) Feuchtwanger as the setting for all our family events.

Appointed acting curator of Judaica of the Bezalel Museum after the death of its founding director, Mordechai Narkiss, Grandfather visited the museum daily, including every Shabbat. Eventually, the entire family followed, and thus, along with the playground and school, the Bezalel Museum became part of my early life and the artefacts were my close friends.

I owe much of my vocational choices to my grandfather. He was only sixty-five years old when he died and I was too young to savour his knowledge and expertise, but probably not too young to absorb his enthusiasm and intellectual curiosity at the sight of an old wooden mezuzah, a silver amulet, or a parchment Esther Scroll. This is how my love of Jewish visual culture was born.

My maternal grandfather, Advocate Mordechai Levanon, played a very different role in my life. Attorney and judge, he was my model of an intellectual and a Jewish scholar, tirelessly studying another page of Talmud, another biblical exegesis, or another midrash, while equally inquisitive about all the secular sciences. He was as familiar with the Jewish Bible as with the Christian Scriptures and the Quran. Over ninety years old, already conversant in nine languages, he was determined to teach himself yet another. He read every printed word on a

scrap of paper that lay in front of him, unable to quench his thirst for erudition. From him I learned perseverance and true humanism, but above all, the love and appreciation for our religious and intellectual heritage.

My parents raised me to seek knowledge everywhere. My father, Prof. Moshe Michael Feuchtwanger, is a role model for intellectual wealth ranging from music and history to his profession, medicine, and surgery, his specialty. My late mother, Dina ז"ל née Levanon, an educator by profession and social worker by vocation, was a true *mater familias*, my paradigm for the values of truthfulness, honesty, and unmatched integrity. Together they taught me to challenge my intellectual capacity, to seek new horizons, to broaden and deepen my scope of interest, to strive for academic accuracy, and to show excellence in any endeavour. I am grateful to them for my quest of scholarship. This book is a token of my love and appreciation for them and for their encouragement.

Entering the groves of academia, I was fortunate to have come under the tutelage of the finest teacher and mentor, Prof. Bezalel Narkiss ז"ל. A vessel of incredible understanding and knowledge, studying and working under him was as challenging as it was fulfilling. With awe, he introduced me to the fascinating world of illuminated manuscripts. The embellishments, micrographic images, and text illustrations found in a manuscript still excite me as in my first probes into research. Through Prof. Narkiss, I learned not only to see the physical book with its quires, script, and illuminations. Looking beyond the immediately comprehensible, he taught me to view the embellishments as texts, reflecting a world gone by, which was a mélange of religious belief, customs, and history. He was overjoyed with the *Nuremberg Miscellany* and my research project, but regretfully did not live to see its fruition. His death in 2008 left me, like so many other students and colleagues of his, feeling like an orphaned child. God rest his soul.