CHAPTER TWO

THE PRINTER’S MARK OF IMMANUEL BENVENISTE
AND ITS LATER INFLUENCE

In the early centuries of printing, the makers of Hebrew books adorned the title pages of their works with an insignia to represent their printing house. These emblems or marks referred to the printer’s “name, vocation, place of residence, ancestry, the quality of his work, the sovereign of the country, or simply a symbol of prosperity and good luck.”

One of the symbols most widely used in printers’ marks to represent family origin and current status is the raised hands with spread fingers representative of the priestly blessing of the Kohen, used by diverse printers over many centuries. The most popular emblem, however, was the lion, with its implications of aristocracy and Davidic descent. An unusual symbol is the printer’s mark of Giovanni Grifo, that is, a griffin holding a stone from which a globe is suspended.

A number of these devices achieved widespread recognition and status that has lasted over the centuries. Among them are the tower employed by Gershom Soncino, the representation of the Temple by Marco Antonio Giustiniani, and the three crowns of Alvise Bragadini. These ensigns graced the title pages of works printed centuries later by printers who shared no relationship to the original printer who first adorned his title page with the device.

Another prestigious printer’s mark, widely utilized over time in several lands, is less well recognized and its printer’s name less well known than many other devices used less extensively on the title pages of Hebrew books. The printer’s mark is that of Immanuel (Manuel) Benveniste, who printed Hebrew books in Amsterdam from 1641 to 1659.

Little is known of Immanuel Benveniste’s antecedents, although his family is believed to have been among the Jewish refugees from Spain or Portugal, that he was descended from the illustrious Sephardic family of that name, and that Benveniste came to Amsterdam by way of Venice.

---

1 The original version of this article was published in *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 19 (Cincinnati, 1994), pp. 3–20.
which explains why he signed his name in the Italian form, Imanoel Benveniste. He moved to Amsterdam because that city offered better opportunities for the distribution of Hebrew books than any city in Italy.³

In Amsterdam Benveniste’s printing house issued, according to Fuks’s enumeration, forty-eight Hebrew and six non-Hebrew titles, and, according to Zafren, based on Moses Marx’s unpublished bibliographies, a total of eighty-eight titles. The variance in the two enumerations is not as great as it seems, however, for Marx counted Benveniste’s talmudic treatises as books.⁴ Benveniste’s output encompassed the major works of Judaism, including Midrash Rabbah (1641–42), all four parts of the Shulhan Arukh (begun 1642), Hillchet Rav Alfias (1643), a complete Talmud (1644–47), Pentateuch and Prophets, prayer books, and a variety of smaller works.

Immanuel Benveniste’s escutcheon was an upright lion facing inward towards a tower; a star is above the lion and the tower. The lion is on the viewer’s right, the tower on the left. Fuks writes that Benveniste’s mark was an ancestral insignia, but acknowledges that he is unable to trace its origins.⁵

At least six forms of Benveniste’s device have been identified. In all cases, excepting his talmudic treatises, Benveniste’s insignia is set in a crest above an architectural frame (sha’ar) surrounding the text of the title page. On the title pages of the Benveniste tractates his mark appears at the bottom of the page in an ornamental shield, with a helmet in the crest (fig. 8 Berakhot, Amsterdam, 1644). At the lower right hand corner of the frame of all the non-talmudic works are the initials ‘CVS’, representing the artist who prepared the woodcut, Christoffer (Cornelis) van Sichem.⁶

---

⁵ L. Fuks, pp. 146–47.
⁶ There were actually four, closely related, woodcut artists named Christoffel van Sichem. They employed the same monogram on their work, overlapped in time, and, as might be expected, given their collaboration, had similar styles. The frames for Benveniste’s title pages, based on the period they were active, were prepared by either van Sichem II or III. Discussion of the van Sichem’s woodcuts do not mention the frames for Benveniste’s Hebrew books, although they claim to provide comprehensive listings of the output of the van Sichems. Ref. Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, An Introduction to the Woodcut of the Seventeenth Century (New York, 1977), pp. 39–72.