A Person Must See Himself as if He Left Egypt: The Seder Night and Rabbinic Paideia

by Ishay Rosen-Zvi*
(Tel Aviv University)

Passover celebrations in Second-Temple times, as narrated by Jubilees, Philo, and the Gospels, included sacrifice, wine and thanksgiving psalms, but there is no mention of either Hagadda or Seder – These are rabbinic innovations, first attested in the Mishnah (Pesahim chapter 10). While scholars agree that the invention of the Seder night has to do with the destruction of the Temple and the termination of the Passover sacrifice, they debate bitterly where did it come from and what does it mean? Is it a popularization of the rabbinic beith-Midrash ethos? An adaptation of the Hellenistic symposium? A Eucharist-like anti-Christian polemic? Through a close reading of the Mishnaic chapter we will offer a new answer to this old riddle. We will do so with a different approach than used in these former studies: instead of asking what are the origins of the Seder, we will ask what kind of consciousness does it attempt to form. Thus, the Seder night becomes a chapter in the formation of the rabbinic Self.

Thursday 22.3.18 | 11:00

IIAS lecture Hall 130, Feldman Building, The Hebrew University, Edmond J. Safra Campus, Givat Ram, Jerusalem