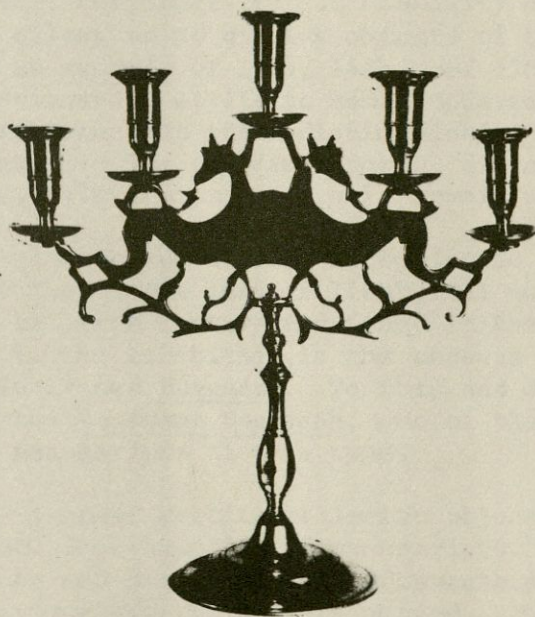


JEWISH CULTURE
in the
MIDDLE AGES



April 26 - May 7, 1974

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JEWISH CULTURE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

This exhibition, brought together for the Eighth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, is intended to present, in a limited manner, the range of Jewish art and culture in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

Paradoxically, almost all of the objects on display in this exhibition completely post-date the centuries of our concern. However, the longevity and stability of tradition in Jewish culture allows us to display objects of the 18th and 19th centuries as exempla of 13th, 14th, and 15th century models. Unquestionably, stylistic modes apparent in the 18th and 19th century works are their distinguishing features for date and provenance. But the basic forms, dictated to by liturgical need, folk custom or ritual, remain unchanged.

The one major chronological exception to our display of late objects is the single leaf of liturgical music recorded by Obadiah, in the 11th century and found in the Cairo Genizah. A major lacuna in the exhibition is the absence of any example of an early illustrated Haggadah. To this end we are showing a facsimile of the Kaufmann Haggadah, one of the major 14th century Jewish manuscripts of this type.

There is a great paucity of Jewish objects from the Middle Ages, with the exception of manuscripts. Literary sources attest to the activity and craftsmanship of Jewish metalsmiths and jewelers during this period. The fact that so little remains is mute testimony to Christian society's disregard for Jewish culture and art in Medieval Europe. The situation was analogous to that of early 20th century Rome when a newly discovered group of Jewish catacombs of the early Christian centuries were peremptorily recorded, then razed and filled with rubble to serve as the foundation of new apartment buildings.

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JUDAIC ART

1. MEGILLAH; Central Europe; 17th-19th century

The Megillah (Book of Esther) is chanted during the festival of Purim, a holiday which commemorates the salvation of the Jews of Persia from the hands of Haman, the King's minister. The name, Purim, means "lots"; Haman cast lots to choose the day on which the Persian Jews were to be slaughtered. The scrolls of the Book of Esther provided a major outlet for the decorative talents of Jewish artists and scribes, particularly those scrolls which were meant for use in the home.

This Scroll of Esther is written on lambskin; its handles are wood, inlaid with pewter.

Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tennessee

2. MEGILLAH; Central Europe; 18th century

With its fine silver case, this scroll exhibits the elaborate ornamentation lavished on these works.

Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tennessee

3. YAD; Probably German; 18th century, Silver

The pointer, which takes the form of a hand (yad), is used during the reading of the Torah scroll, thus eliminating possible damage to the sacred text and parchment through contact with the reader's hands. These implements are among the most elaborate of synagogue ritual art; they were usually made of silver, but often were fashioned out of gold, and encrusted with precious gems.

Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tennessee

4. KETUBAH; Marriage Contract, 1530; Vellum

Illuminated marriage contracts are known to have existed as early as the 10th century, and the major center for this art appears to have been Italy. Indeed, the custom of the decorated marriage contract was so firmly established there, that families would compete with one

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another in the richness of ornamentation of these documents. The motifs included portraits of the bride and bridegroom, coats-of-arms, floral patterns, architectural frameworks, emblems of the 12 tribes of Israel, signs of the zodiac, and symbols of the four seasons. The example shown here combines a number of the above elements. The text is placed within a portico whose columns are composed of six-pointed Stars of David, in which are painted bird, floral, animal and zodiac motifs. Beneath the arch, at the head of the text, is a crown, flanked by two birds. Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tennessee . 8

5. PLATE; Probably German; 18th century; Pewter
The bride and bridegroom, their heads covered, stand in a courtyard under a canopy held by three figures in the balcony above. This ceremony, under the canopy (chuppah), is said to represent their union under a symbolic sanctuary, in the presence of God.
Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tennessee
6. PLATE; Probably German; 18th century; Pewter
The Festival of Tabernacles (Sukkot) commemorates the redemption of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, and their wanderings in the wilderness before coming to the Promised Land. During this period they dwelt in booths or huts (sukkah). Observance of the festival centers about the sukkah, a temporary shelter built adjacent to the house, its roof covered only with leaves and branches, to remind man of his dependence upon God, and the protection afforded the Israelites during their wanderings. During the festival, which coincides with the Fall harvest, the family takes all its meals in the sukkah. This plate, a mate to the "Wedding" plate, depicts the family gathered in the sukkah, and appears to have been derived from an engraving of the scene by J. B. Piccart of 1725.
Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tennessee 9

7. PLATE; German; 18th century; Pewter
The inscription, "Gut Woch" (Good Week), suggests that this plate may have been used as part of the table setting of the ceremonial Sabbath meal in the home.
Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler; Memphis, Tennessee
8. PASSOVER PLATE; Holland; 17th century, Pewter, cast and engraved. The inscription along the outer rim gives the order (seder) of the Passover service, celebrated in the home on the first two nights of Passover. The center area is divided by a six-pointed star; in the sections thus formed are placed the symbolic foods of the Passover seder: 1) The Egg; a hard-boiled egg, slightly roasted, representing the festal sacrifice offered in the Temple with the Paschal sacrifice; 2) The Shankbone; a roasted lamb-bone, symbolizing the Paschal lamb; 3) The Bitter Herbs; usually horseradish, representing the bitterness of the Egyptian bondage; 4) Charoset; a mixture of apples, nuts, cinnamon and wine, symbolizing the mortar used by the Israelite slaves; 5) Vegetable; a green vegetable, dipped in salt water and eaten; 6) The Salt Water; this may be said to represent the tears shed by the Israelites while in Egyptian captivity.
Collection of the Jewish Museum of New York
Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman
9. TORAH BREAST PLATE: Probably Russian; 18th century, silver
The Torah breast plate (tas) had its origins in Jewish communities in the West (c.16th century), where the scrolls were customarily stored in the Torah Shrine. If a congregation had several scrolls from which different services were read concurrently, (i.e., if a holyday fell on the Sabbath), the Ashkenasi congregations initiated the practice of hanging a plaque on the scroll, labeled with the prescribed reading for the day, thus eliminating possible confusion and error. These plaques became more elaborate with time, and the panel which held the inscription for the text ultimately disappeared, and what had formerly been entirely functional in purpose, now became yet another decorative ornament in the synagogue.
Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tennessee

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The Festival of Chanukah commemorates the revolt against the oppression of the Syrian Empire, led by the priest, Matathias and his son, Judah Maccabee. During the struggle, the Temple, which had been desecrated, was restored and rededicated. (Chanukah: Dedication). Observance of the festival in the home recalls the miraculous rekindling of the lights of the Temple, when a cruse of oil, containing sufficient oil for just one day remained alight for eight days. It is customary therefore, to kindle lights in the home for eight days, lighting one the first day, two the second, etc. Since the lights represent the Temple lights, and are considered holy and not to be used for any other purpose, a shammash (caretaker) light is used to kindle the others.

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10. CHANUKAH MENORAH; Central Europe; 17th century; Pewter
Fashioned in the standing style which was very popular in Central and Northern Europe, this oil lamp has a backplate which is engraved with a stylized floral pattern. The borders and tray derive their design from the shell which surmounts the backplate. The shell is a symbol of regeneration and resurrection and, as such, is relevant to the theme of rededication and the symbolic rekindling of the Temple lights.
Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tennessee
11. WEDDING RING; Central Europe; 18th century; Silver
Rings such as this were often the property of the synagogue and were loaned to the betrothed couple for use in the wedding ceremony. The building probably represents the Temple of Jerusalem. The top lifts up to reveal a Torah Shrine and scrolls of the Law. This part forms the cover of a small enclosure, which may have held the actual wedding band. The entire design may symbolize Psalm 137:6, "....if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest job." It may be analagous to the traditional ending of the Orthodox Jewish wedding ceremony, at which time the bridegroom breaks a linen-wrapped glass underfoot, in remembrance of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem....remembered even in moments of happiness.
Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tennessee
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12. CHANUKAH MENORAH; silver

On this standing menorah the backplate is ornamented by floral and foliate motifs. The rampant lions hold the Crown of the Torah over the Tablets of the Art, giving the appearance of a coat-of-arms. The depiction of the crowned Torah stems from the writings of the Ethics of the Fathers, (IV, 17), where it is stated that "...there are three crowns, that of the Torah, of Monarchy, and of Priesthood, and that of a Good Name surpasses them all." This tradition carried over to the ornamentation of the scrolls themselves with crowns.

Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tennessee.

13. SPICE BOX; North African, 18th century, bone & silver.

The service at the end of the Sabbath (havdalah: separation) was marked by the kindling of a special twisted taper during a ceremony which included an overflowing cup of wine and fragrant spices. Because, in the Middle Ages, the cost of spices was often prohibitive, other herbs, or a sprig of myrtle (hadas) were sometimes used instead. They were placed in the perforated spice boxes called hadas after the dried myrtle leaves. The most popular style was that which took architectural form, often in the shape of a flag-topped tower (#13), which may have derived from the shape of Medieval incense burners, or the monstrance, which contained the Host. In Central Europe the form was more likely to be organic, embellished with leaves, and small birds (#17). The egg-shaped spice box (16) unscrews to reveal several compartments into which the spices are inserted. The filigree shell of the "egg" allows their fragrance to escape.

Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tennessee

14. YAD; Probably Near East; 18th century, Brass

15. YAD; Near East; 17th-18th century, Silver

16. SPICE BOX; Central Europe, 18th century, Silver, egg-shaped

17. SPICE BOX, Central Europe, 18th century, Silver

Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tennessee

18. SABBATH MENORAH; Polish; 18th century; Brass
The kindling of lights is an important aspect of the observance of the Sabbath in the home. The ceremony is performed by the mistress of the household on the eve of the Sabbath (and holydays as well). There are usually a minimum of two lights, in keeping with the Biblical injunctions to "observe" and "remember" the Sabbath (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5,12). The animal motifs on this menorah are typical of the organic designs used in Jewish art of Central Europe.
Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Justin Adler, Memphis, Tenn.
19. PASSOVER PLATE; prob. 18th century; Pewter
The Hebrew inscription on the rim refers to the 15 sections into which the seder is divided. In the center, a lamb on an altar inscribed with the Tablets of the Law, refers to the Paschal lamb. The inscription below the alter refers to the egg used during the seder.
Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler; Memphis, Tenn.
20. SABBATH LAMP FOR OIL; Persia; 16th century; Brass, cast
This is typical of the lamps seen throughout the Middle East, the earliest examples being made of clay. The oil was poured into the hole at the top, which may have had a hinged cover. The two projecting arms held the lighted wicks. The inscription in Hebrew is the blessing spoken while kindling the lights.
Collection of the Jewish Museum of New York
Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman
21. CHANUKAH MENORAH; Silver
The Crown of the Torah is seen above the Tablets of the Law, and the entire motif is surrounded by a field of elaborately wrought grape vines and clusters. The shammash light is missing.
Hirsch Collection
22. CHANUKAH MENORAH; Italy; form, c.1600, 19th century casting; Bronze, cast
This Chanukah lamp was made to be hung on the wall, and, therefore, the design was concentrated on the

backplate, which features typically Italian motifs of tritons, cherubs, cornucopias, and ewers, incorporated into a vine foliate pattern. The urn at top center is surmounted by the figure of Judith. She carries a sword, now broken, in her right hand; in her left hand, but now missing, was the head of Holofernes.

Collection of the Jewish Museum of New York

Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman

23. PITCHER FOR WASHING THE HANDS; Persia; 16th century; Brass, engraved

Hebrew incscription: Blessing recited when washing the hands. This wqwe was probably used in the home for the ritual washing of the hands before prayer or a meal.

Collection of the Jewish Museum of New York

Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman

24. PLATE; Syria; 19th century; Brass, with silver and copper overlay; Damascene process

Hebrew inscription is the formulaic expression "Next year in Jerusalem."

Collection of the Jewish Museum of New York

25. CHANUKAH MENORAH; Italy; 17th century; Brass, cast
The backplate of this wall-hung Chanukah lamp, with its seven-branched candelabrum, set within an architectural framework of arch and columns probably symbolizes the Temple at Jerusalem. These paired motifs may be traced back to antiquity in Jewish art. The classicizing style of this lamp is further seen in the head of Mercury at the top of the arch.

Collection of the Jewish Museum of New York

Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman

26. TORAH CASE (TIK); Persia (prob. Isphahan); 1764; Silver, with engraved decoration

Hebrew inscription: Presented to the Hacham Solomon Synagogue in memory of the soul of the righteous elder Jacob, son of the teacher Nissan...may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing... Tebeth 5524 (1764).

On the outside and inside, quotations from Biblical and liturgical sources, e.g., Numbers 10:35,36; Deuteronomy 4:35,44 and 6:4; Psalms 29:11, 67:1 and 2-8, 96:10,11, 144:15; Isaiah 2:3; Proverbs 3:17, 18.

The richest and most elaborate Jewish art is found in the ornamentation of the Torah Scrolls. Characteristic in Oriental communities, was the practice of enclosing the Torah Scrolls entirely in silver cases, which stood upright on the lectern, to be opened for reading during the services. The finials often took the form of apples or pomegranates (rimmonim).

Collection of the Jewish Museum of New York
Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman

27. CHANUKAH MENORAH; prob. Babylon (Iraq?); 18th-19th century; Brass, cast

Since the story of Chanukah revolves about the rekindling of the lights of the Temple, the backplate of menorahs often assumed architectural form, thus relating the daily lighting of the lamp to the site of the original act. While European lamps of the Middle Ages often adopt the facade and rose window of the Gothic cathedral, and later Italian lamps incorporated the Classical arch and paired columns of the typical Torah Shrine, this menorah, of Eastern provenance, bears the architectural features of a mosque.

Collection of the Jewish Museum of New York
Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman

28. SHOFAR

The shofar (ram's horn, trumpet) plays an important role in Biblical history and Jewish ritual. It was sounded as a reminder of the Creation, as a call to war, as a reminder of the Day of Judgment, to announce the Resurrection, and, most significantly, it is sounded each year at Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur and for the month preceding these High Holy Days as a call to repentance, accompanied by penitential prayers.
Hirsch Collection

29. MEGILLAH;

An example of the intricate work that went into the design and execution of the Scrolls of Esther, this megillah was probably made for use in the home.

Hirsch Collection

30. CHANUKAH MENORAH; Silver

A standing menorah of silver repousse, its surface is elaborately decorated with foliate designs. On the upper portion of the backplate is a miniature Torah Ark, flanked by the lions of Judah, and surmounted by the Crown of the Torah. Inside the Ark, in Hebrew, is inscribed the blessing recited when kindling the lights. The beaker at the right contained the oil, which was then poured into the shammash, left, from which the other lights were kindled.

Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Justin Adler; Memphis, Tenn.

31. ELIJAH CUP (FOR THE SEDER TABLE); Eastern Europe;

1659; Pewter, cast, engraved

Hebrew inscription: "Cup of Elijah the prophet.

1659" During the course of the seder, four cups of wine are drunk to commemorate the four expressions of redemption mentioned in Exodus 6:6-7. The presence of a fifth phrase, suggested the necessity of a fifth cup of wine, but since there was some doubt as to its relevance, sages decided to reserve the fifth cup of wine for the prophet Elijah, who, tradition states, will decide all the unresolved problems of the Talmud. The door of the house was therefore kept open during the seder for the arrival of the prophet. This custom was originally observed before the Middle Ages, as an invitation to strangers and travelers to enter and join in the service. The persecutions of the Middle Ages, however, resulted in the seder being conducted in secret, and the practice was discontinued, to be replaced by the symbolic opening (and closing) of the door to welcome Elijah. He was relevant to the Passover theme of redemption, since his arrival is said to announce the coming of the Messiah.

Collection of the Jewish Museum of New York

Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman

MANUSCRIPTS AND BOOKS

1. MANUSCRIPT FRAGMENT, Fustat (Cairo), 11th century
Liturgical chant and notation written by Obadiah, a Norman Catholic convert to Judaism. This fragment is one of three by Obadiah found in the Cairo Geniza. It contains a piyyut (lyrical embellishment to an obligatory prayer) "Mi al Har Horev" with its melodic indications. The text is a eulogy on Moses intended for Shavuot or Simhat Torah.
Collection: The Jewish Theological Seminary
2. MANUSCRIPT, Spain, 15th century
A Hebrew translation of Ibn Sina's Canon. This medical treatise is based primarily upon the work of Galen, and through translations into Latin was the European guide to medicine from the 12th to the 17th century.
The nature and quality of Judeo-Islamic culture in Spain is clearly shown in this manuscript by the calligraphy which closely resembles Arabic, and by the ornament: austere, geometric patterns closely analagous to Islamic Koranic decoration.
3. MANUSCRIPT, German, 18th century
Haggadah, handwritten on vellum, dated 1729. The text is the traditional ritual order of the Passover meal (Seder: order, or sequence) with its attendant prayers and recitations in Hebrew. In this manuscript the margins are filled with a Judeo-German translation of the Hebrew,
Although the Haggadah may have appeared as early as the 8th century, its existence as an independent book scarcely predates the 12th century. It very early became the vehicle for extensive narrative illustrative cycles, although the earliest extant illustrated Haggadot date to the 13th century. The quality of extant Haggadot varies, and our 18th century German exemplum almost falls into the "folk-art" category. But the continuity of iconographic schemes makes this manuscript a part of a long tradition. This is especially evident when

we compare the manuscript with the 14th century Kaufmann Haggadah, now in Budapest (and seen here in facsimile).

The two printed Haggadot represent a break with the old iconography and the start of a new tradition of images. The Prague Haggadah (1527) makes repeated use of single figures of an allegorical or symbolic nature. Narrative scenes are few, and the wood-cut images that do appear are usually relegated to the side margins. The Mantua Haggadah (1560) has a far more ornate decorative scheme and richer narrative cycles. Every page has a decorative border of vine rinceaux, foliate and fruit swags, and music-making putti. Interspersed among these stock decorative devices are single figures of a symbolic type, analogous to those in the Prague book, although different stylistically. The Mantua Haggadah, additionally, has numerous narrative scenes in the bottom margins illustrating aspects of the biblical narrative of Exodus, e.g., the Departure from Egypt, and Pharaoh's Army Drowning in the Red Sea.

The Hebrew press in Prague was established in 1512 and our manuscript is an extremely early example of its work. The Hebrew press in Mantua was established by 1476. The higher degree of sophistication of the Mantua book's decorative scheme can be attributed, not only to the influence of the Italian Renaissance upon the Jewish printer in Mantua, but also to the longevity of the printing house itself. By the time our example had been printed the press had been actively producing Hebrew books for more than eighty years.

4. PIEDRA GLORIOSA by Manasseh ben Israel, Amsterdam, 1655
This work, in Spanish, is a commentary on the Book of Daniel by a noted Jewish scholar and founder of the earliest Hebrew printing press in Amsterdam (1626). Ben Israel was a friend of Rembrandt who did etchings for the Piedra Gloriosa, as well as a portrait of Manasseh. The etching visible is Daniel being saved from the Lions, in this first edition of the book.

5. HAGGADAH, Printed, Mantua, 1560

6. HAGGADAH, Printed, Prague, 1527

Edith Cooper
Stanley Ferber