Heinrich Frauberger: On objects of ancient ritual art in synagogue and home[*]

Summary and Analysis by Olga Melasecchi, Jewish Museum of Rome

Heinrich Frauberger (1845–1920), a German-Catholic art historian, has been the director of the Industrial Arts and Crafts Museum in Düsseldorf, and member of the board of directors of the art exhibition at the Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, 1904. In the same year he wrote this essay that, despite of some inaccuracies, is certainly a pioneering and very important writing for the classification and identification of Judaica.

According to Joseph Gutmann (*On Medieval Hanukkah Lamps*, in "Artibus et Historiae", Vol. 20, No. 40, 1999, pp. 187–190, in part. p. 187), Frauberger was no expert on Judaica, but simply relied on the hearsay conveyed by collectors in general. In fact, he was still aware that his work would be imperfect because he did not have, as he says, enough study material to be able to argue his claims, so the "Objects of Ancient Ritual Art" is methodically a rather empirical work.

In checking references to Italian examples in said treatise, I begin with the first observation concerning the "oldest extant Torah ark", which, for that time, he had identified in the *Aron* from Modena (1505), still true today in regards to movable property, but refuted by the recent discovering of the stone *Aron ha-kodesh* in Agìra (Sicily) dated 1454. This discovery is further proof that inside synagogues the *Aronot* were often integral part of the architectural design/decoration, therefore in stone or marble, while wooden pieces were intended for less official environments or intended to be moved (e.g. prayer rooms in private homes), as, in fact, Frauberger also specifies in this essay, when he says: "In the Talmudic period, the ark itself was carried around on the street; hence, it was mobile. All arks mentioned so far seem to have been mobile. Mobile arks are very frequent in home synagogues".

Starting with the curtains, one can not confirm his idea that "in synagogues of the Spanish and Portuguese rite, the curtain is mounted inside the Torah ark while in the synagogues for the German and Polish rite, usually outside the doors". In fact the curtains coming from the Castilian and Catalan synagogues of the Roman Ghetto are very large, therefore destined to be outside; comparing the measures of the *Parokhot* with the ones of the *Aronot*, still existing and placed inside of the Roman Main Synagogue, in the Spanish Synagogue and in the Museum, is clear that they could stay only outside. So that means that his sentence, if right for other European examples (i.e. the Esnoga Synagogue in Amsterdam, Bevis Marks in London, Venice Synagogues, or Curacao to name but a few), can not be applied on Roman examples.

Even the classification according to his drawings does not seem to me to be applicable to the Roman *Parochot*.

When he describes the Italian Torah wimple I think that there is some confusion: when Frauberger writes of two ribbons or wimples he perhaps alludes to the traditional Roman way of wrapping the Torah first around a large, very rich and decorated *Mappah*, and then all tightened by a smaller wimple (fig. 1).

[*] Published in German: Über alte Kultusgegenstände in Synagoge und Haus (Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft zur Erforschung jüdischer Kunstdenkmäler zu Frankfurt am Main III–IV), Frankfurt/M. 1903, English translation by Lilian Dombrowski.



Fig. 1: Mappah and wimple donated by David Bonanno Di Segni to the Scola Nuova, February 7th, 1674, silk brocade satin, cm 60 x 211, inv. n. 583 B; cm 25 x 335, inv. 583 D

The description of the Italian wimple as a single, entire piece, is correct, however the oldest examples, in linen, dating back to the end of the 16th century – and not the 15th as he writes – are made up of several parts joined together with crocheted edges (fig.2).



Fig. 2: Mappah (or wimple as Frauberger calls it) donated by Gavriel Capuano to Scola Nuova in 1591, embroidered linen and bobbin lace, cm 64 x 140, inv. n. 1059

The description of the Torah mantle is correct, but the word is wrong, because he writes here *Mappah*, instead of M*e'il*. The headpiece in his fig. 15 is that one of the *Me'il* Shelomo Fiano donated in Rome in 1764.

About the description of the *Rimmonim*, although correct in detail, is wrong in chronology. In fact, according to the pieces present in Rome and dated thanks to the engraved inscription, the most ancient ones, dating back to 1651, have a cylindrical end, in the shape of a pomegranate, while the tower shape, very well described by him, is more frequent in the 19th century Roman items (fig. 3), while the description of the crowns is perfect. The description of the *Tas*, in Rome called *mezzacorona* (halfcrown) is also quite correct, especially when he writes that "it is not uncommon for an Italian Tas to look like part of a crown".

The description he gives for the *Yad* cannot be applied to the Italian items, or at least not to the Roman ones. He writes that the pointer hangs on a chain from the upper ends of the tips of the breastplate, sometimes from a hook on the breastplate; but no Roman pointer has the ring that was used to hold the chain. On the other hand, however, he must have been familiar with the Roman

pointers as he describes the palm branch *Yad*, the Uzielli *Yad*, realized in Rome by Gaspare Vanneschi in 1770–1772.



Fig. 3:Unknown Roman silversmith, Rimonim Natornai, 1651, cm. 56 x diam. 13,5, inv. n. 13. Donated by Ora Natornai to the Scola Nuova (inscription). The crown in the upper part is a probable a later addition of the silversmith Angelo Giannotti (active Rome 1824–1865) (mark).

The passage concerning the description of the Italian reader's stand covers is a bit confusing, since the description he gives is applicable to the Roman *Mappot*, and not to the *Tikkun ha-Tevà*. It is true that in Rome there are many of them, but perhaps here he is referring, again, to the *Mappot*, which are many as well. Finally, I do not know where he got the information that "they were used as curtains in the synagogue, as décor in the sukkah, in Rome itself in earlier times as decoration of the streets where the Jews in the States of the Church payed homage to the new pope", since the known Jewish ephemeral apparatuses used for this purpose were made of paper painted in watercolours.

Frauberger's knowledge of Italian Renaissance *Hanukkah* lamps is interesting. In Italy, however, strangely enough, there are no examples of those objects, at least not known ones, even if, being objects of mainly domestic use, it is possible that they are still in private collections. Some time ago the Jewish Museum of Rome received one as a donation from a private person, but the execution, rather sketchy, seems to be a fake (fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Hanukkah lamp, bronze, beginning of XX century (?), donated to the JMR in 2012, 16 x 19,6 x 6 cm (base with cups width cm 22), inv. n. 2185