

### III Synagogue Furnishings and Ritual Objects<sup>1</sup>

By Dr. Elisabeth Moses

While the buildings in the Rhineland are provincial in character, transportable works of art have been assembled from all conceivable regional areas. Rich fixtures in synagogues are supplemented by domestic ritual objects. The artistic items in synagogues were largely made by local craftsmen. However, here as well as in the treasuries of churches, we do come across the occasional silver object which was commissioned from a famous goldsmith in Augsburg or Nuremberg. Ritual objects for use in the homes of members of a congregation much more frequently had their origins outside the Rhineland. We know that most old, Jewish families in the Rhineland were rarely resident here for more than a few centuries. Having come from all parts of the empire, they brought their few precious belongings—often heirlooms—with them. On top of this are reciprocal relationships between Jews from various regions within the empire through marriage, trade, etc.

As a result, in individual families Dutch silverware can be found next to works from Southern Germany, and Moravian next to Italian illustrated manuscripts. In the field of metalwork, with this proviso, we are mostly confronted with Christian artists executing Jewish commissions. Not that there were no Jewish craftsmen, as is popularly assumed. Rabbi Judah even said: “He that does not teach his son a trade, it is as though he had taught him brigandage!” In Antiquity as well as in the Middle Ages, there were Jewish craftsmen in the Orient, in Italy, and in the South of France. In Germany, and this of course also applies to the Rhineland, working as a craftsman was—except in just a few cases—only possible if one was admitted to a guild. And these were closed to Jews. While crafts flourished in the post-medieval period in Poland, Moravia, Bohemia, and Turkey, where Jews played a large and important role, they were excluded from working in this field in Germany right up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Only in 1812 through the Stein-Hardenberg Jewish legislation and, more importantly, as a result of the Jewish emancipation edict was it permitted to work as a craftsman in Prussia. Other German states then followed suit.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, items which can be found made by Jews from earlier centuries are generally imports from the East or the South. Of course there are exceptions, especially in the large and important field of writing. Another branch of the decorative arts, weaving and embroidery, lay in the hands of women who did not require any particular authorization to carry out a craft. These wonderful textile artworks, for which we are grateful today, can be seen in our synagogues in the Rhineland.

When one's eye is immediately caught by the *almemor* on entering a synaogoe, then this is primarily due to the ornamentation on the front of the ark in the form of a Torah curtain (figs 1–6). The profundity and exhilaration, colorfulness, and radiance of the Pentateuch are reflected in these compositions in rich brocade, dark-red velvet, and opulent embroidery. The tradition found here also

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1 Moses, Elisabeth: III. Ausstattung und Kultgeräte der Synagoge, in: Aus der Geschichte der Juden im Rheinland. Jüdische Kult- und Kunstdenkmäler, in: Rheinischer Verein für Denkmalpflege und Heimatschutz, no. 1 (1931), pp. 137–164.  
2 *Jüdisches Lexikon II*, p. 1401. E. J. VII, p. 947 ff.

dates back to the tabernacle: “And he made a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen: with cherubim made he it of cunning work.”<sup>3</sup> While the ritual in Spain and Portugal requires the curtain to be on the inside of the ark, it is generally hung outside in Polish and German synagogues: “... and [he] set up the veil of the covering, and covered the ark of the testimony ....”<sup>4</sup> A small overhang, matching the curtain, covers the rail. Devout members of a congregation donated such paroches for use on feast days or in memory of deceased relatives. Women often gave their bridal gowns to be reworked.



**fig 1. Torah curtain  
Mainz Synagogue  
Donated by Löb, son of David Ulma, and his wife  
Edel, daughter of Herz Levi Ginzburg, 1749  
Brown velvet embroidered with silver, pink, and  
green silk. Central panel of green velvet with silver  
embroidery**



**fig 2. Torah curtain  
Mainz Synagogue  
Brown and red velvet with silk and gold  
embroidery, donated in 1783**

Unfortunately, in the Rhineland no curtains have survived either from the Middle Ages or from the Renaissance. To date, I have not come across any curtains from before 1700 in other areas of Germany or abroad either. This is hardly surprising considering how often the exquisite materials were exposed to destruction or fire. Some curtains may well have been used to conceal silver stolen from the synagogues. All the richer is the number of parochot still in existence from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

3 Exod. 36:35.

4 Exod. 40:21.

The treasury in Mainz alone has several dozen which are now in the historical collection of the “Verein zur Pflege jüdischer Altertümer”<sup>5</sup> (figs 1, 2). The wealth and generosity of the members of the congregation stand out most prominently in the case of these donations. The liturgy only specifies the color white for principal feast days; on the Day of Penance black is customary. Otherwise, there was no law governing the choice of a curtain.

The composition of curtain decoration from the Baroque period doubtlessly draws on the tradition of earlier centuries. A rectangular piece of colorful brocade or embroidered silk is mostly set against a dark velvet background or, vice versa, a section of material in one color is placed on patterned silk. The plain central panel is then filled with symbolic depictions, ornaments, and inscriptions.<sup>6</sup>

Material in bold colors was chosen as soon as it was brought out by the silk industry for decorative purposes or clothing—with bold pomegranate motifs, pretty flowers, and swirling rocailles combined with delicate pastel colors or regal red and gold which gave these curtains a thoroughly secular touch, in marked contrast to the text of the inscriptions and the embroidered symbols. The following compositions are most frequently to be found: two pillars each side of the central panel (standing for Boaz and Jachin, the pillars outside the tabernacle), twisted in the Baroque style of the period, entwined with vine leaves and standing on richly profiled bases or ball feet, the capitals often crowned by flower vases or even replaced by the same or with leaping flames (figs 1, 2, 3, 4). Frequently, they are appliquéd in a different material and embroidered in colored silk and gold thread. Two rampant lions above the central panel support the Keter Torah, i.e. the crown of the commandments, often accompanied by two other crowns, the crown of teaching and the crown of kingship returned. The lion, which we encounter time and again on ritual objects in the most varied of

forms, is intended as a reminder of the commandment found in the Sayings of the Elders: “Be as mighty as a lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven.” In addition to other symbols it was also to be found in Solomon’s Temple. According to the Blessing of Jacob, the lion is the symbol of the Tribe of Judah. “You are a lion’s cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?” “Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion . . .”<sup>7</sup> The richest embroidery is to be found on the overhang on which the usual requisites from the tabernacle are shown: the seven-branched lamp, the sacrificial altar, the Tablets of Stone, the table with showbread, fountains, a washing vessel with the jug of the Levites, the breastplate of Aaron with symbols representing the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Aaron’s two hands in the blessing gesture, and frequently also the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant itself (fig 1–3).

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5 Peter Metz, “Ein Gang durch das Museum jüdischer Altertümer in Magenza,” special issue of *Menorah*, Vienna n.d.

6 Symbols or references of any kind incorporated in the pattern of the material such as a halo (see Jewish ritual and artistic objects in the Hessisches Landesmuseum zu Kassel) are not, in my opinion, warranted.

7 Num. 23:24.



**fig 3. Torah curtain in Offenbach Synagogue  
Late 17<sup>th</sup> century  
Cream-colored damask silk with embroidery in  
silver and colored silk**



**fig 4. Torah curtain  
Mannheim Synagogue  
Dark-red velvet with appliqué work and  
embroidery in gold and colored silk**

Between the figurative depictions individual letters and words enliven the surface areas with a repetition of the words “Keter Torah,” scrolls, and columns with pronounced, decorative Hebrew inscriptions. Other areas are used to provide explanations of what is shown as well as the name of the donor or the donor’s family, the date of the donation, and the occasion. Gold and silver lace, fringes and gilt, colored glass, and small bells add to the splendor and magnificence of the paraments.

It would be going too far to describe all the parochet individually to be found in treasuries in the Rhineland, especially since their stylization, which as always in such cases leads to an erosion and misunderstanding of the original, is similar, with only the combination of different materials adding any new appeal.

Attention may however be drawn to just a few individual and unique items, the creation of which is doubtlessly based on the design of an artist executed by a skilled embroiderer. An especially early object is a curtain in Offenbach Synagogue as indicated by the inscription: “Donated by the Chevra Kadisha<sup>8</sup> for Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), renewed in 1725 when Josef, son of Wolf was head of the congregation” (fig 3). It was, therefore, probably made in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Its prescribed use on feast days is in keeping with the materials used: damask silk with silver embroidery, and its discrete colors: green vine leaves, a little light blue and colorful pieces of velvet to highlight the magnificence of the crown. The curtain itself is plain: the large central panel flanked by pillars is completely covered in writing. The overhang is all the richer with the above-mentioned depictions on the points: an incense altar, a table with showbread, the breastplate of Aaron, the venerable Tablets of Stone, passed down over a mountain with trees (Mount Horeb) by two hands (of God). In addition are the tabernacle, the washing vessel, and the seven-branched lamp named accordingly. Above are the three crowns with two cherub wings each side of the central crown, personifications of the clouds, which according to the bible surround the divine apparation. The cherubim are also guardians of the Holy of Holies as the Ark of the Covenant lies under their wings.<sup>9</sup>

One of the best-known objects of this kind, published by Heinrich Frauberger in the “Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft zur Erforschung jüdischer Kunstdenkmäler,”<sup>10</sup> is the wonderful curtain in Mainz Synagogue (fig 1). Red silk pillars, with rich *bouillon* appliqué work in gold thread and embroidered in red and green silk, are sewn onto a brown velvet background. The central panel in red velvet stands out in a celebrative way and corresponds to the overhang. The depiction of Mount Sinai in the central panel is original: two hills are shown on which the two olive trees, fully laden with fruit, stand for the oral and written teachings; in the background is the fence which Moses had to erect around the mountain at God’s command before being given the commandments. The empty space in the central panel is filled with a poetic inscription: “Isak Naphtali (Herz Reinach) son of Jekel of here (Mainz), to fulfill the last wish of his wife, Sarle, daughter of R.(abbi) Herz Ursel, who dedicated her dress for this holy vestment, and her will shall be fulfilled for the healing of her soul and the work completed for Shavuot (i.e. the Feast of Weeks, Pentecost), in Mainz 1783.”

The beautiful curtain donated to Deutz Synagogue by Joseph and Rahe Cassel in 1781 is soon to be admired in the Rheinisches Museum in Deutz, Cologne (fig 6). It is a particularly outstanding representative of its kind for a wider region. Different from other standard compositions, the whole surface area here is covered by a large, ornamentally treated baldachin with gathered curtains, rich cords, and tassels—a symphony in reseda, salmon pink, light rose, and white silk on green, brown, and

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8 A society for charitable work and burials.

9 *Jüdisches Lexikon*, vol. I, p. 1356.

10 Vol. JJI/IV (1903) p. 17



**fig 5. Torah curtain in Bonn Synagogue  
Donated by Jakob Süßkind Oppenheim of  
Frankfurt a. M. in honor of the Elector Clemens  
August of Cologne (1723–1761)  
Green and strawberry-colored damask silk with  
appliqué work in white and yellow**



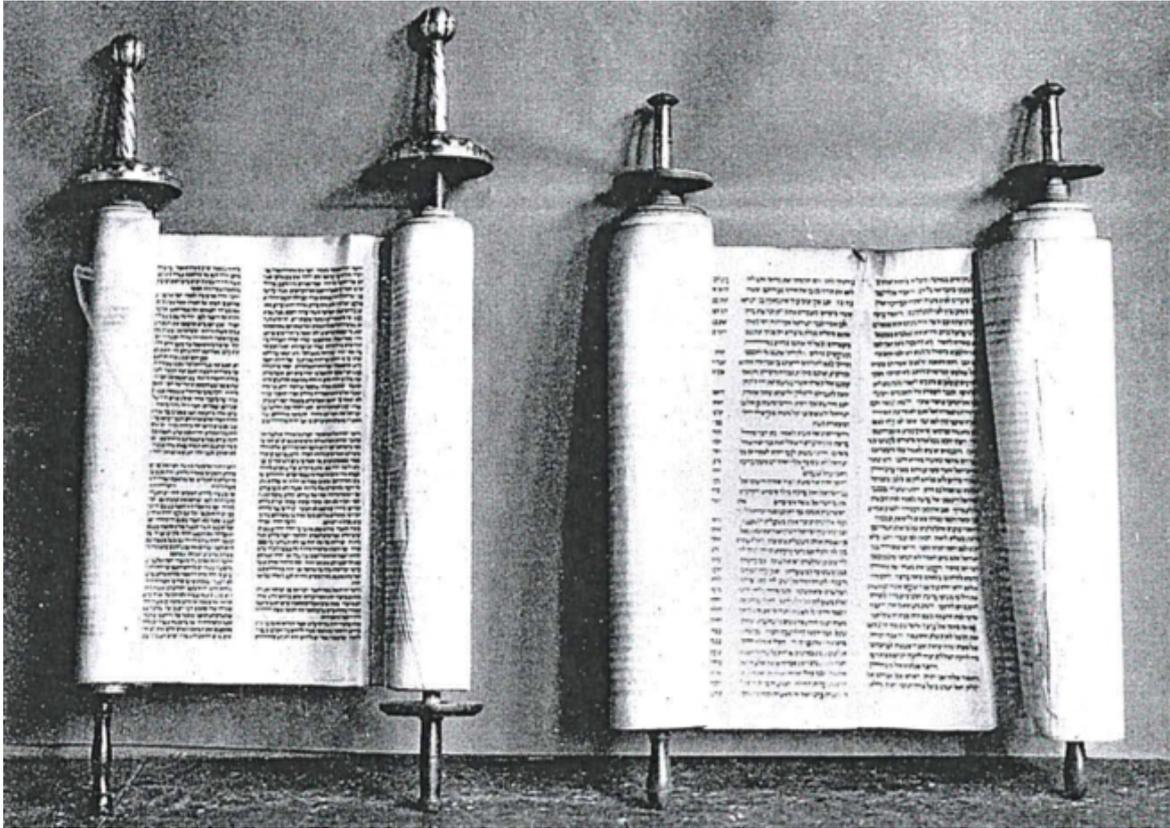
**fig 6. Torah curtain of the former synagogue in  
Deutz  
Now in the Rheinisches Museum zu Cologne.  
Donated in 1781 by Joseph and Rahel Cassel.  
Reseda green, salmon pink, and white silk. Green  
and brown velvet with silver and gold embroidery.**

red velvet, with a wealth of silver and gold embroidery. This depiction may have been influenced by a curtain in Bonn Synagogue which is of special historical interest as the princely baldachin, with its ermine hanging and voluminous floral garlands, speaks for a tradition according to which Jakob Süßkind Oppenheim of Frankfurt and his wife, née Katz, donated this curtain in honor of the Elector Clemens August of Cologne (fig 5). The combination of green and strawberry-colored damask silk, enlivened by appliqué work in white and yellow, corresponds to the coloristic taste of the time.



**fig 7. Torah curtain  
Deutz Synagogue, 1732 (from the Dülken family)**

Most of the selected 40 Torah curtains from the Rhineland, shown at the Millennium Exhibition in Cologne in 1925, date from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. With the general decline in the decorative arts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, new parochot also lost their beauty. Many a sin was committed during this time, too, through tasteless restoration.



**fig 8. Torah scrolls  
1643 and 1700, Worms Synagogue**

The Torah, the scroll of the Teachings, the Holy of Holies, is to this day written in keeping with ancient, strict rules as a scroll. Printed forms or lithographs are absolutely taboo. Parchment, rarely vellum, is the material that has to be used. It must be treated by Jews and can only be sewn together with the sinews of kosher animals. The *sofer* (the Torah scribe) has to use specially prepared ink and a quill and has to keep exactly to prescribed rules with regard to the size and spacing of the letters. Ornamental decoration, except for the small crowns above some letters, is strictly forbidden. The Torah is rolled onto two poles, the *Etz Chaim* (Tree of Life), and read from right to left (fig 8). In the Middle Ages it was rolled onto one pole as can be seen in a depiction in the manuscript *Yad ha-Hazaka* by Maimonides.<sup>11</sup> Decorations may be added to the poles in the form of turned ornamental elements, sculpted ivory or silver sheaths over the ends.

The two impressive Torah scrolls from Worms Synagogue, measuring 1.25m and 1.10m in length (fig 8), were shown at the Millennium Exhibition. The larger one with rich silver attachments dates from 1643; the other is from 1700. Worms has a much older treasure: the Torah scroll which the famous Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg (*d.* 1293) is reputed to have written during his imprisonment in a tower in Ensisheim and from which, three times a year, a section is read at the end of Purim festivities. To prevent it loosening, the rolled Torah is firmly bound in a wimpel made of silk or, in later centuries, of linen. Such wimpels are a child's swaddling cloths brought by a boy the first time he

<sup>11</sup> In the ownership of Mrs. Hermann Cramer, Frankfurt a.M., illustrated in Frauberger, op. cit., III/IV p. 16.



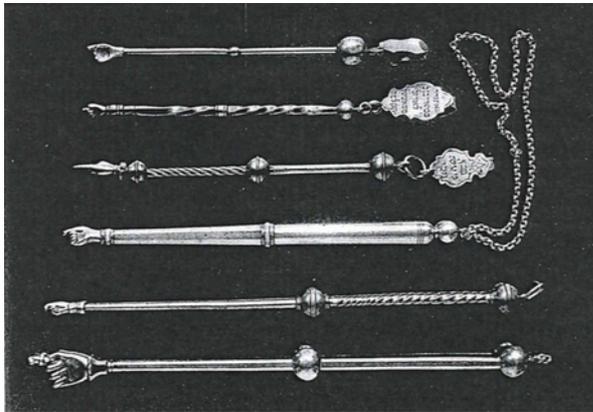
**fig 9. Torah wimpel**  
**Painted linen, donated by Mordechai Gumpe, son of Meir, 1816**

enters a synagogue as a reminder of the big day. It is 34m long, at least in West Germany, generally cut from the cloth used in the circumcision ceremony, with figurative illustrations and, more importantly, with a slightly ornamental embroidered inscription. From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, painting in watercolors was also added. Wimpels are a form of birth register with the child's precise date and place of birth and the names of the parents (fig 9). As such, they are a replacement for official birth registers and are of considerable importance for genealogical research into individual families. The blessing "may God raise him up to [a life of] Torah, a successful marriage, and good deeds, Amen" is included on most wimpel. Some images relate to these words: a young boy holding the Torah; a chuppah canopy, under which a wedding celebration is held; a man giving out alms. The appeal of these wimpel, which by no means make any claim to be works of art and are mostly created by non-professionals, is especially to be found in the folk art-like execution of flowers scattered here and there, and the cheerful embellishments that emerge from among the letters, as well as in the letters themselves which incorporate so much of the old tradition from medieval manuscripts in the ornamental filling within their framework, some of which survived into the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Needless to say, many hundred such wimpels exist in synagogues in the Rhineland. In the Worms Synagogue archive more than 600 are recorded from between 1570 and 1841 alone.<sup>12</sup>

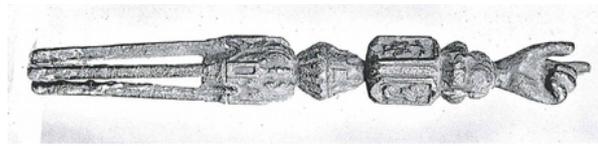
As it is strictly forbidden to touch the script of a Torah, a pointer—a *yad*, meaning "hand"—is used. Especially when a new member of a congregation is called upon to read, the corresponding place from which he is to continue can be shown. A pointer is shaped as a baton which can be round, angular or turned, smooth or decorated. In keeping with the word "yad" it terminates in a hand. It is attached to the Torah by a chain. A small plaque bears the name of the donor (fig 10). Silver is the preferred material. A comparison with Torah pointers from earlier eras shows to what extent the quality declined in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries—and the objects in the Rhineland are generally of this period. Poorer communities, small village synagogues which could not afford a silver *yad*, had to do with pointers

<sup>12</sup> Samson Rothschild, teacher at the municipal school in Worms, went to great pains to decipher these texts and established that the drawings very often related to the name of the house in which the father of the boy lived—i.e. a wheel, a horseshoe, a horse, a hat, a star, etc. His efforts were well worthwhile. Historical figures, e.g. Samson Wertheimer (b. 1642 [sic. actually 1658]), court Jew to Emperor Leopold, were also among the donors. It would be very desirable if such sources on the history of a Jewish congregation were studied systematically in other places, too. Cf. Samson Rothschild, "Aus Vergangenheit and Gegenwart der israelitischen Gemeinde Worms," Frankfurt a. M., Verlag J. Kaufmann 1926, p. 26 ff.

made of wood. Zell a. d. Mosel, for example, still has such a roughshod monstrosity, and in Heidelberg there is a wooden object, one end of which is used as a *yad*, the other as a candleholder to mark the end of Shabbat (fig 11).



**fig 10. Torah pointers From various synagogues, silver, 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries**



**fig 11. Torah pointer Wood, Heidelberg Synagogue**

One of the most festive moments during the religious service is when the Torah is lifted out of the ark and carried around the synagogue, still decorated with all its ornaments and to the gentle sound of bells. These ornaments comprise the wimpel, the Torah cover or mantle in which the Torah is wrapped, and most importantly the silver items, the *tass* (shield), the *rimmonim* (decorated tops to the poles), and the crown.

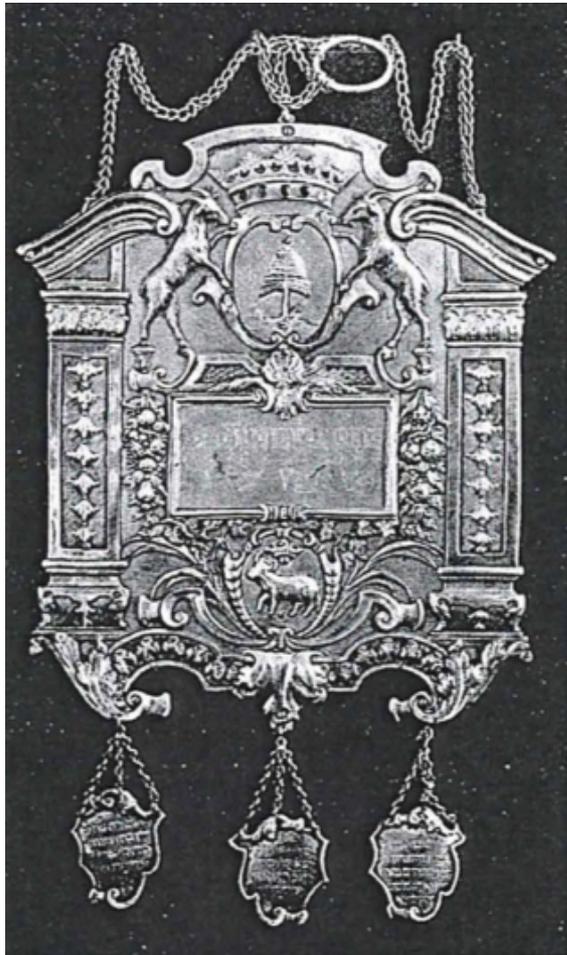
These silver objects are a congregation's most precious and best looked-after artistic treasures and their age and elaborateness mirror those of the community. If there are several Torah ornaments, like the Torah curtain, these are exchanged and used on specific different festive occasions. That these exquisite objects are so little known among art historians can only be explained as a result of a secrecy governed by fear. Even Marc Rosenberg, one of the greatest connoisseurs of European gold work, only mentions a few items from museums and art collections in his comprehensive work "Der Goldschmiede Merkzeichen" (Goldsmiths' Marks).<sup>13</sup> The Jewish section in the Millennium Exhibition of 1825 in Cologne, on the other hand, showed a large assortment of surprisingly high artistic quality, whereby certain congregations had kept back their best pieces in some instances because they could not do without them in their religious services for such a long time.

From the assayers' marks it can be seen that only a few items were made in the Rhineland. Congregations in Mainz, however, generally commissioned items from local masters but the work itself was executed in Augsburg and Nuremberg. It is possible that one or other Jewish craftsman was working for a Christian master; it would, however, not have been possible for him to stamp a work

<sup>13</sup> A systematic study of these synagogal works of goldsmithery would doubtlessly provide an interesting view on how materials were used ornamentally, since goldsmiths seldom had such a favorable opportunity to follow their own ideas as on the large blank area of a shield.

with his own mark. Even if he were working for himself he would not have been allowed to use a masters's mark.

The *tass* is a silver shield which is hung on a Torah scroll on a chain of the same material. It generally covers the central part of the mantle (figs 12–17). In the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was usually rectangular and seldom rounded along the top. In later centuries the shield was framed by arches and volutes.



**fig 12. Torah shields**  
Silver, hallmark: B.H., Augsburg Master  
1779, Bonn Synagogue



**fig 13. Silver, hallmark: J.R. (Fürth)**  
1<sup>st</sup> half of 18<sup>th</sup> century, Museum Jüdischer  
Altertümer, Mainz



**fig 14. Torah shields**  
Silver, mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, Friedberg Synagogue



**fig 15. Silver, Nuremberg, 17<sup>th</sup> century**  
Owned by Mrs. Karl W, Simons, Düsseldorf

One of the earliest objects shown at the Millennium Exhibition in Cologne was that owned by Mrs. Karl W. Simons of Düsseldorf with Baroque embellishments extending over the whole area, with a lively depicted crowned lion and a projecting baldachin over the Tablets of Stone (fig 15). The piece was made by Johann Conrad Weiß. Records show that he became a master craftsman in Nuremberg in 1699.<sup>14</sup> The beautiful Torah shield in Friedberg Synagogue, the work of a master craftsman from Frankfurt which exudes an elegant sense of calm (fig 14), is related in style and composition and has a separate engraved silver plaque fitted on a larger plate. Baroque tendrils growing out of a small vase on each side are linked to the usual motifs—the lion and crown.

An especially beautiful example of leafwork decoration, comprising arcanthus tendrils, fruits, and mussels, can be found in the *tass* in Mainz Synagogue (fig 17). On the reverse is an engraved plaque with a cartouche and inscriptions with the name of the donor: the burial society. The date and place it was made are indicated by the Mainz wheel with the year 1710. The master craftsman's mark IPK is, according to Rosenberg,<sup>15</sup> the goldsmith Johann Peter Köhler, who was active as a master between 1698 and 1724 in Mainz.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Marc Rosenberg, "Der Goldschmiede Merkzeichen" (Goldsmiths' Marks), vol. III, 4279, where Johann Conrad Weiß is mentioned several times. Auction cat. for the Kuppelmayer Collection, pl. XVI, nos 699, 700.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 3344.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Metz, "Ein Gang durch das Museum jüdischer Altertümer Magenza," p. 83 ff. The following silver works mentioned, which belonged to the burial society of the Mainz congregation, etc. are now all in the said museum.



**fig 16. Torah shield**  
Silver, c. 1700, Friedberg Synagogue

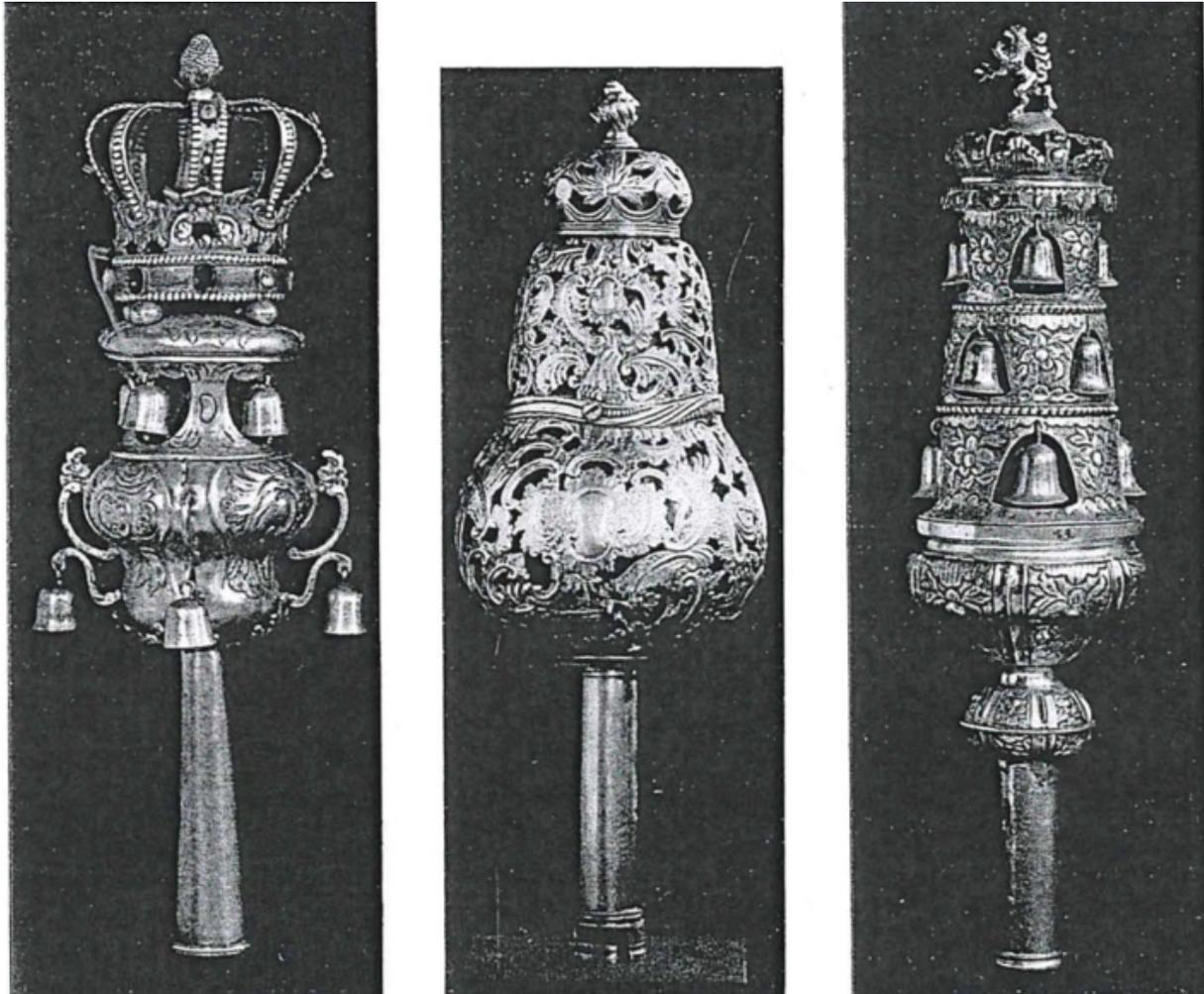


**fig 17. Torah shield**  
Silver, hallmark: 1710, made in Mainz  
Museum Jüdischer Altertümer, Mainz

Another *tass* in Mainz Synagogue (fig 13) is closely linked to the Torah curtains (figs 2, 4) already described, with regard to the motifs depicted. Three plastically modelled, projecting crowns, lions, twisted columns, and cherubim wings form the decorative ornaments of the main field while a small, chased panel has been fitted below on which a showbread table, sacrificial altar, seven-armed lamp, a fountain, and the Tablets of Stone have been attached with nails next to each other. A stack of wood and the flames of a sacrificial altar are similar to a Rococo lattice. The master craftsman J.R. of Fürth has immortalized himself in a special way on each plaque. In all probability this is a Jewish master craftsman who had his own hallmark. "J.R.," possibly J. Rimonim, a thoroughly Jewish name, signed with the Nuremberg assayer's mark. Evidence shows that he was in Fürth and in the Nuremberg ghetto in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to the Nuremberg assayer's mark, that of Fürth—a half-moon with an "F"—can indeed also be found. A pair of *rimmonim* in Mainz synagogue also have the

same mark. Fürth was the home of a number of wealthy Jews who even had their own private synagogue during part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup>

The Friedberg congregation has a magnificent set of *tass* and *rimmonim* from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century—flourishing Rococo with dynamic rocaille ornamentation, flowers and fruits, with which the contextual and essential elements of the *tass*, lamp, and Tablets of Stone are almost suffocated (figs 16, 18).



**figs 18–20. Torah finials, 18<sup>th</sup> century**  
**Silver, left: Friedberg Synagogue; center: Mainz Synagogue**

The Augsburg master craftsman B.H. (probably Bartholomäus Heyglin, master craftsman 1730–1742,<sup>18</sup> or else Benjamin Hentschel, master craftsman 1732–1774) found an original solution for the

<sup>17</sup> Rosenberg (op. cit., II, p. 10, no. 2157) attributes the Torah shield with 4 bells to the same J.R. From 1907 onward, it was in the collection of Karl and Hugo Haas of Karlsruhe together with another *tass*. In addition there is a Torah pointer owned by the Jewish congregation in Stuttgart.

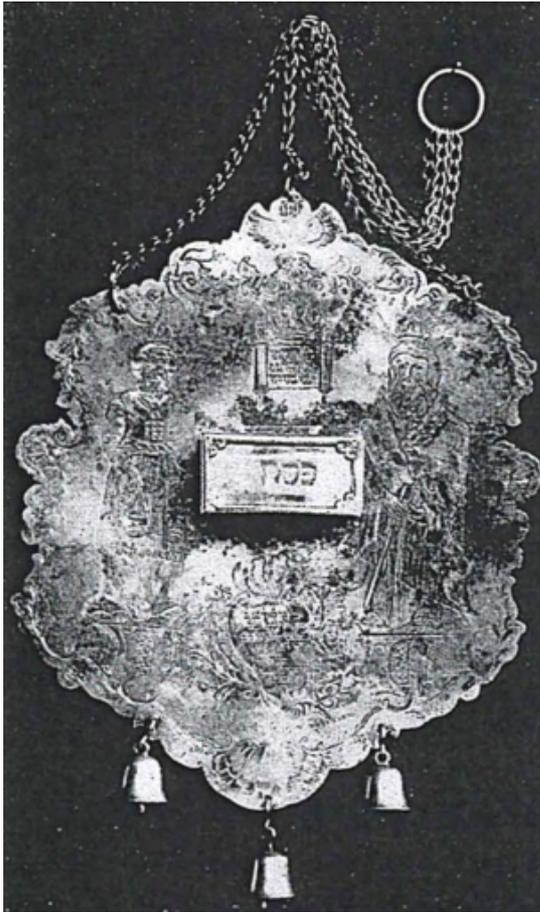
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*tass* in Bonn Synagogue (fig 12): instead of the pillars Jachin and Boaz, pilasters support the gable-like upper element, and the crowned cartouche with the Tree of Life is held by two rampant rams instead of lions. The Tree of Life is an ancient symbol found among Oriental peoples either in the form of a palm tree, a cedar, a vine or a fig tree: “And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden ...” (Genesis 2;9), and as a symbol for the Torah in several instances in the Proverbs of Solomon: “[The Torah] is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her” (Proverbs 3:18).

It is an allegory for the effect of the just, the wish fulfilled: “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life” (ibid.) and for mild words spoken: “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life” (15:4). In another cartouche a crown and a bull are depicted. The bull, like wild cattle, always appears in the bible as a symbol of strength. The bull and the wild ox are symbols of the Tribe of Joseph and his sons Ephraim and Manasseh: “His majesty is like a firstborn bull, and his horns are like those of a wild ox. With them he will gore the nations, even to the ends of the earth. Such are the myriads of Ephraim, and such are the thousands of Manasseh” (Deuteronomy 33:17).<sup>19</sup>The synagogue in Cleves has an exceptional silver *tass* dating from 1751 with engraved figures of Moses and Aaron. The mark of the master craftsman Stuhr is not mentioned in any literary sources (fig 21).

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19 The inscription on the small plate attached reads: “Donated by the esteemed Baruch, son of Simon Jacob Mergentheim of Bonn to be used as decoration, thus fulfilling commandment 539 (1779), and his wife, daughter of the esteemed Arje Leb of Mergentheim of Bonn.”



**fig 21. Torah shield**  
**With figures of Moses and Aaron, silver, hallmark:**  
**1751, Cleve Synagogue**



**fig 22. Torah crown**  
**Silver, 18<sup>th</sup> century, Friedberg Synagogue**

The *rimmonim*, which together with the *tass* sometimes forms a set, decorate the top ends of the two Torah rods and boast a variety of different ornamental shapes. The older ones show a pomegranate (fig 18–20), later a tall crown embellished with bells divided into several sections, its arched outer surfaces are pierced and often richly decorated with chased relief work. Instead of, or next to the *rimmonim*, a large crown—the “Keter Torah”—can frequently be found over the ends of the rods. The Friedberg example has a curious stylistic mixture of elements from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries which indicates that it was later assembled from individual sections. The assayer’s mark “N” in a circle points to a master craftsman from Nuremberg (fig 22).

In all synagogues, their wealth is noticeable through the lighting which is not in keeping with the modesty of the room or its decoration. Isaiah’s words: “With light glorify the Lord” and other places in the bible provide the explanation. Large crowns of lights made of bronze and brass hang from the ceiling in the main room. Curved arms with light holders are arranged around the shaped shaft with spherical ends—a style which can be found in its basic form since the 15<sup>th</sup> century and which, with minor variations, can also be found in many Christian churches and secular buildings up until the 17<sup>th</sup>

century. These suspended lamps have nothing specifically Jewish nor do they have any particular regional properties. Very similar examples can be found in Fürth as in Prague, in Silesia as in Holland and in the Rhineland, and date predominantly from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Medieval lamps are no longer to be found in Worms Synagogue. In the lithographs by Abraham Neu which were made around 1840 there is strangely no lighting either in the men's or in the women's schools. The proud brass lamps from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, crowned with the imperial eagle, in one case with a seated eagle with a male figure riding a streak of lightning, now hang there. The chandeliers in the synagogue in Cleves are of a related kind. Through the number of light holders the effect is all the richer. They were probably rescued from the old Gerwin Synagogue. Lamps were often stolen along with other treasures from synagogues. In rare instances, members of a congregation safeguarded or kept the contents in their own possession when a synagogue was dissolved. Such was the fate, for example, of the chandeliers from the former synagogue in Ehrenbreitstein which are now in private ownership in Neustadt and were shown at the Millennium Exhibition in Cologne.

Wall lamps made of bronze, brass, copper or silver provide light for the benches around the walls in many cases. They were largely made by Christian master craftsmen and have just as few Jewish features as the large chandeliers.<sup>20</sup> The floor standing lamps at the corners of the *almemor* assist reading from the Torah. One example of a typical design are the bronze lamps with cherubim motifs in Beilstein a. d. Mosel.

The eternal light, which burns in a holder in front of the ark, and according to tradition goes back to the light in the tabernacle and the Temple, serves more than just a practical purpose. "An eternal flame shall be kept burning on the altar; it should not be extinguished." *Ner tamid* (eternal light) as a symbol for *esh tamid* (eternal fire).<sup>21</sup> Here, once again, we come across the same designs as in Christian churches (fig 23).

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20 Two silver light reflectors in Worms from the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with rich floral and fruit ornamentation have the same master craftsman's mark as the light reflectors in the treasury at Cologne Cathedral and in the chapel in Linzenich. Cf. Marc Rosenberg op. cit., vol. II, p. 198, no. 2755.

21 Ex. 27:20. Symbol for the eternity of God's word, 2<sup>nd</sup> Book of Moses 27:20–22



**fig 23. Eternal light, bronze**

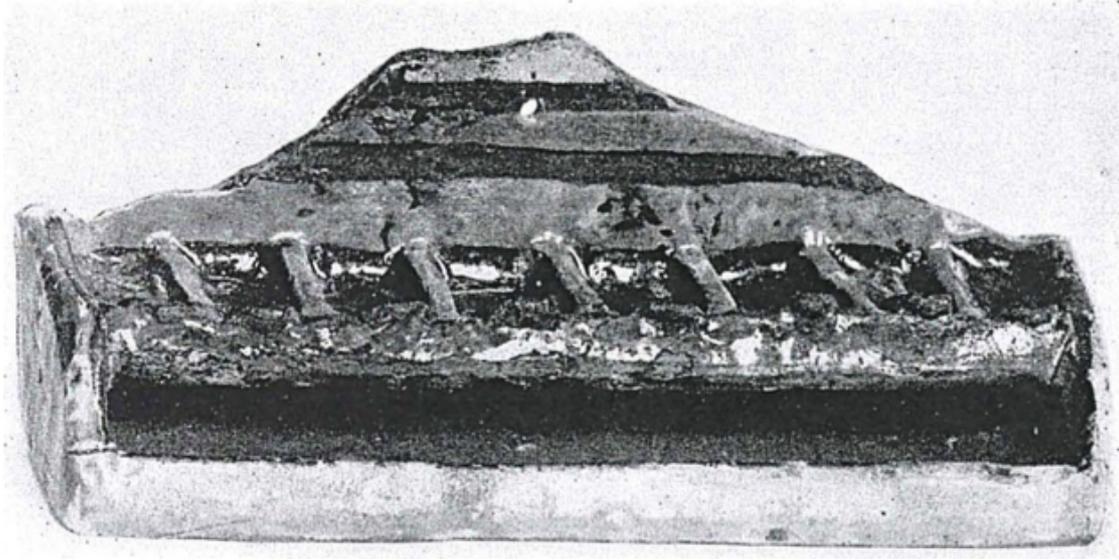
In old synagogues, the holders for *yahrzeit* candles, lit in memory of a deceased person, are generally fitted on one of the parapet walls on the steps to the ark. They are seldom of artistic interest and can be bypassed at this point.

With the seven-branched Hanukkah lamp or menorah we finally encounter a distinctly Jewish ritual object (fig 24).

Some words about the origin of the Hanukkah festival, the feast celebrating the re-dedication of the Temple, to bring its importance to mind: After Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Temple of Jerusalem in 169 BCE it was dedicated anew on the same day, on 25 Kislev, three years later following the victorious revolt of the Maccabees. A new lamp was placed where the old lamp, destroyed by Antiochus, had once been. During the rebuilding of the Temple an flask with oil that had not been deconsecrated was found. This oil burned for eight days although there was only enough for one day.<sup>22</sup> The Hanukkah festival is a reminder of the re-dedication of the Temple, referred to by Josephus and in the Talmud as the “Festival of Lights.” Every evening another of the eight candles is lit as a reminder of the flask of oil. A ninth candle, the so-called *shammes* (servant), is used as a taper.

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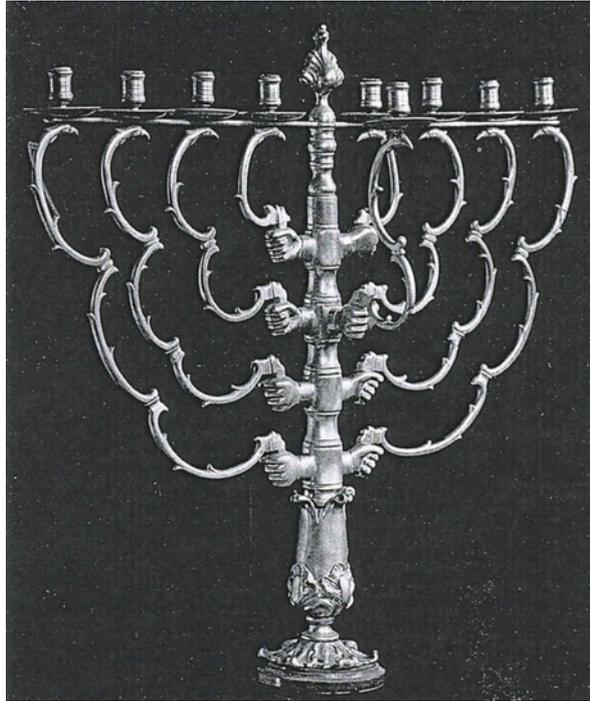
<sup>22</sup> Erich Toeplitz, „Die Menorah des Hanukkah festival” in *Beiträge zur jüdischen Kulturgeschichte*, issue 1, Frankfurt a. M. 1924



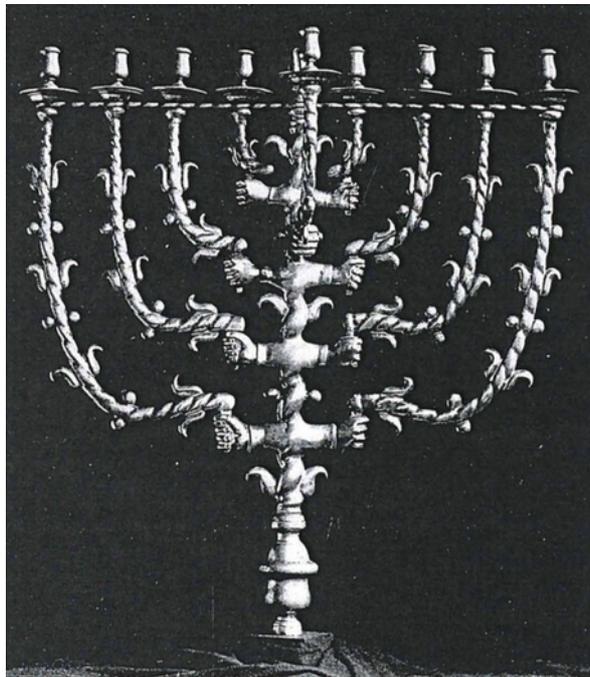
**fig. 23 b. Hanukkah lamp**  
Clay, from Höhr. Owned by Rabbi Dr. Rosenthal, Cologne

The menorah is essentially a household ritual object. Sources report of *menorot* in synagogues in the Middle Ages, mostly displayed for other people and the poor. The shape and material used for these lamps varies considerably according to their use. Ritual regulations specify that clay is to be avoided if possible as it is unsightly after being used. Nevertheless, *menorot* made of clay can be found in Hesse and the Westerwald (fig 23 b). *Menorot* are however generally made of bronze, brass, pewter or silver. The portability of objects and their manifold copying make it extraordinarily difficult to pinpoint them to any one place. Their dating is easier as the ornamentation and figures were adapted, sometimes more so, sometimes less, to the style of a specific era. Only wall *menorot* are known from the Middle Ages, i.e. holders for eight oil flames with a triangular background. Many variations of this style of menorah could be found during the Renaissance period.

The contribution made in the Rhineland during these periods remains unknown as the *menorot* there faced the same fate as other ritual objects. A better orientation with regard to the development of various styles can be gained from a number of examples from the Baroque onward. First of all there is the masterpiece in the synagogue in Cleve—a monumental bronze lamp from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (fig 25). Nine, powerful, clenched fists are arranged around a turned central column, probably as a reminder of the strength of the Maccabees, each with a candle holder in the shape of a branch. The branches with spherical, floral and chalice-like shapes as seen on so many *menorot*, may be based on the description



**fig 24. Menorah**  
Bronze, 18<sup>th</sup> century, Goch Synagogue



**fig 25. Menorah**  
Cleve Synagogue, bronze, 17<sup>th</sup> century

of the lamp in the tabernacle.<sup>23</sup> The Temple lamp in the frieze on the Arch of Titus in Rome is of a similar shape. The same motif, modified into the light and elegant designs of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, can be seen in the menorah in Goch Synagogue (fig 24). The branches here terminate in thin volutes.<sup>24</sup> The molded shaft emerges from a chalice with Rococo motifs. The Heidelberg lamp, donated by the chief imperial court Jew Samuel Oppenheim of Vienna at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, continues the tradition of eastern examples with its shaft made up of a series of spheres.



**fig 26. Menorah**  
Silver, by a Hamburg master craftsman, 17<sup>th</sup> century. Owned by Mrs. Karl W. Simons, Düsseldorf

<sup>23</sup> Ex. 25:31 ff., 37:17 ff.

<sup>24</sup> The lamps in the synagogue in Wesel are the same.

The inclusion here of smaller *menorot*, which were probably used in private houses, is due to the fact that it is not possible to make a clear distinction between synagogal and domestic lamps since, in addition to large floor-standing lamps, small ones were also used in the synagogue. Of the large number of existing items owned by private individuals and museums in the Rhineland, representative examples of the various genres are listed here. It should however be emphasized once again that only a small number of these easily transportable ritual objects were made in the Rhineland. In most cases they were brought by families who had moved here from other areas in Germany. An item of silverware of great quality, the menorah owned by the family of Karl W. Simons of Düsseldorf, for example, bears a Hamburg mark (fig 26). The figure of Judith with the head of Holofernes and the sword, depicted in high relief, can be seen on the oval rear panel. This figure, which appears frequently on *menorot*, comes from a traditional story in the Haggadah from the times of the Maccabees, as told by the daughter of the High Priest—one similar to the Judith story and later apparently one woven into it.<sup>25</sup> Like Judith, the figures of Moses and Aaron are among the popular depictions found on *menorot* as can be easily explained through their connection to the content of the feast day. Tulips and carnations, the fashionable flowers of the Baroque period, fill the space between the three figures. Eight heart-shaped cups contain the oil vessels. The lamp is designed to be hung or placed on something else.

Another silver lamp in the same collection displays the design popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with a crown and lion, as on Torah curtains and Torah shields, and the seven-branched lamp in the cartouche, intended as a reminder of the re-building of the Temple lamp (fig 27).

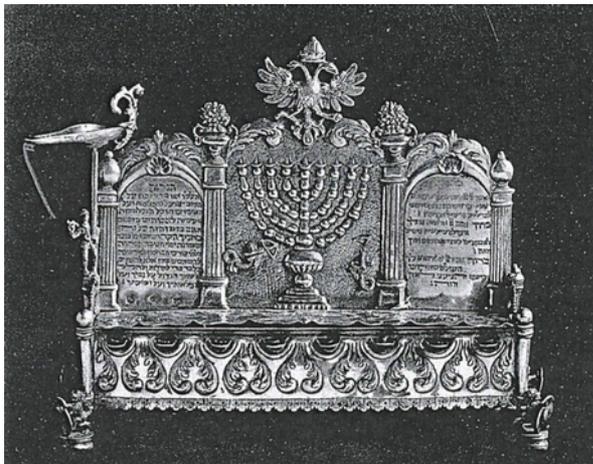


**fig 27. Menorah**

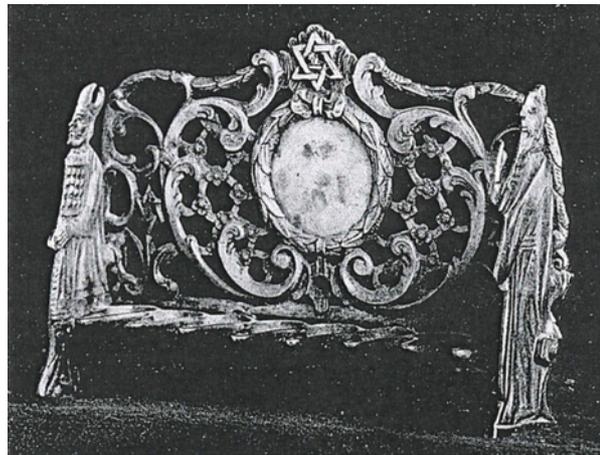
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25 Cf. Toeplitz, op. cit.

What the Hanukkah lamp of the ordinary person looked like in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is shown in fig 29: a bronze menorah with rocaille decoration, latticework and the “Magen David”—two overlapping triangles. The “Magen David”, i.e. the Star of David or Shield of David, is a sign which was popular in Ancient Egypt and among the Chinese and Peruvians. It appears on a Hebrew seal from the 7<sup>th</sup> century and became the most popular symbol in Judaism from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onward. In medieval sources it is referred to as “Magen David and Abraham.” It is used in various different forms in mysticism. As a messianic symbol it shows the constellation of Pisces in which the arrival of the Messiah is expected. Kabbalist and other interpretations also play a role.<sup>26</sup> The figures of Moses and Aaron are shown again at the sides. This style of lamp would appear to have been produced in large numbers and is especially prevalent in Prague.<sup>27</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the character and self-evidence in the shape of the menorah became less apparent.



**fig 28. Menorah**  
Silver, mark: T.T. 1711. Owned by Dr. Oppler, Hanover



**fig 29. Menorah**  
Bronze, 18<sup>th</sup> century. Owned by *Geheimrat* Apfel, Cologne

In addition to Torah ornaments, beautiful metalwork can be found among the furnishings of synagogues. As in the Christian church, Jewish priests wash their hands in a ritual ceremony prior to reciting a blessing. At the entrance to a synagogue simple water containers hang on the wall for use by the faithful. This custom of washing hands before entering a place of worship is maintained to this day in the East among Islamic people. As in the Christian church, the same type of washing vessels were used which—in keeping with their purpose—are so similar that the synagogal object can only be identified by the Hebrew inscription. This probably also explains how medieval objects have survived. They were originally made for another more general purpose and were later acquired by a community. The small congregation in Bornheim near Bonn, for example, has a Romanesque bronze basin with two spouts (fig 30) and Beilstein an der Mosel an elegantly shaped, Late Gothic brass jug (fig 32). The magnificent washing vessel in Mannheim Synagogue, the work of a master craftsman from Augsburg of 1660, would quite easily have been confused with its relatives in the Catholic and Protestant

26 For more details and literature see: *Jüdisches Lexikon*, vol. III, p. 1281.

27 This style is frequently forged.

department at the Millennium Exhibition in Cologne had it not been for the Hebrew inscription on a raised part of the plate which tells us that this is a Jewish ritual object (fig 31).

The furnishings of older synagogues frequently include circumcision benches. These generally seat two. One of the seats was for the child's godfather, the other is reserved for Elias (the protective spirit of children and the redeeming Messiah whose arrival is to be expected at any time) and therefore remained empty.

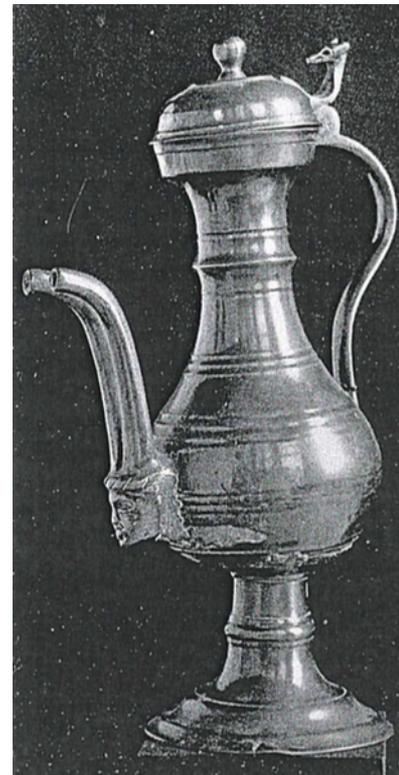
Worms has two very attractive, wide chairs, richly turned in an archaizing style. All the more surprising as the inscription gives 1717 as the year they were made. The benches in the synagogues in Deutz and Krefeld, on the other hand, pick up on the style of the Rococo and Louis XVI (figs 33, 34).



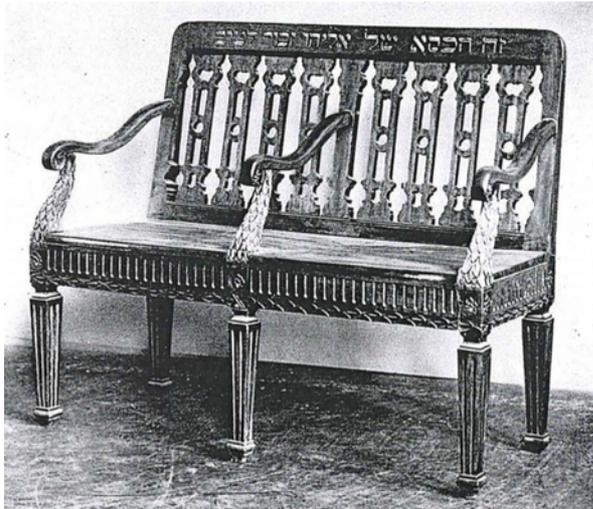
**fig 30. Washing vessel**  
Bronze, Romanesque, Bornheim  
Synagogue



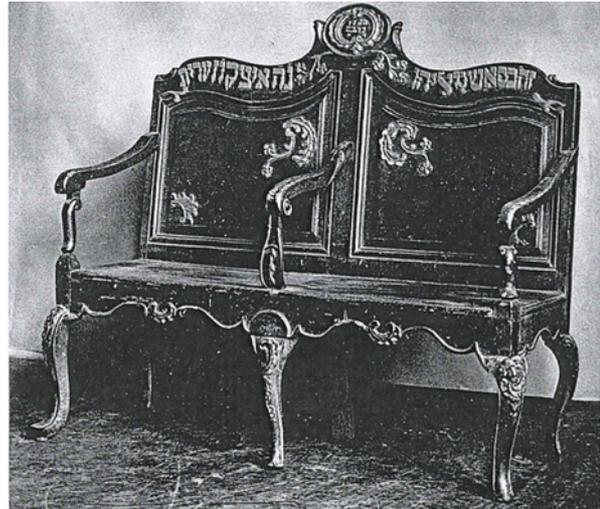
**fig 31. Washing vessel**  
Silver, Augsburg master craftsman,  
1660, Mannheim Synagogue



**fig 32. Late Gothic brass jug**  
Synagogue in Beilstein an der Mosel

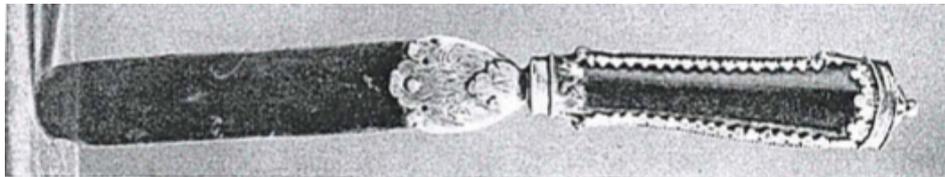


**fig 33. Circumcision bench**  
Mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, Deutz Synagogue



**fig 34. Circumcision bench**  
2<sup>nd</sup> half of 18<sup>th</sup> century, Krefeld Synagogue

Of the instruments which the *mohel* uses in the circumcision ceremony, several examples were shown at the Millennium Exhibition in Cologne (fig 35). Like other instruments, the silver knives with opulent, exquisite handles of amber, agate, ivory or mother-of-pearl do not display either regional features or those of a specific period. The small metal sand bowls used at a circumcision ceremony are more artistic. Of these, a rare gilded silver example of the 16<sup>th</sup> century is in the ownership of Mrs. Sally Fürth of Mainz; it bears no mark; diameter 7 cm, height 2.5 cm. Only the inscription around the rim reveals the ritual purpose of the object: “This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised” (fig 36).



**fig 35. Circumcision knife**  
16<sup>th</sup> century, Museum der Gesellschaft zur Erforschung Jüdischer Altertümer, Frankfurt a. M.



**fig 36. Small circumcision sand bowl  
16<sup>th</sup> century, gilded silver  
Owned by Mrs. Sally Fürth of Mainz**

#### IV Domestic Ritual Objects<sup>28</sup>

By Dr. Elisabeth Moses

According to the commandments, the home is the most precious possession in the eyes of a Jew. It may perhaps be more highly revered than among any other people. The home provides shelter for the family; a place which over thousands of years has always been taken away and fought for anew; the only place outside the synagogue where the “eternal Jew” found peace and was protected from animosity. Here, when not working, he could talk to god without being disturbed and immerse himself in the study of the bible and the Talmud. These customs, previously followed by all Jews whether poor or rich, are no longer so widespread in the West as a result of assimilation.

A *mezuzah* is fitted at the entrance to an apartment, in some houses on every door to a room and is a reminder of god’s presence and the fulfillment of the commandment: “And thou shalt write them (the commandments, statutes, and judgments) upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.”<sup>29</sup> A strip of parchment on which the words from Deuteronomy 6:4 ff. are written is placed in a container made of wood, often richly carved, or of metal, in such a way that the word “*Shadai*,” i.e. the Almighty, can be seen through a small opening in the container. These *mezuzot* are generally simple tubes; seldom does one find carved wooden or artistically chased metal examples (fig37).



**fig 37. Mezuzah**  
Wood, Cologne, private collection

28 Moses, Elisabeth: IV. Häusliche Kultusgeräte, in: Aus der Geschichte der Juden im Rheinland. Jüdische Kult- und Kunstdenkmäler, in: Rheinischer Verein für Denkmalpflege und Heimatschutz, no. 1 (1931), pp. 165–190.

29 Deut. 6:9.

The *mizrah*, a plaque made of stone, wood, metal or paper, shows which direction is east, i.e. Jerusalem, for prayers. Apart from the name of God, depictions include the menorah in the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. Mostly made by amateurs, these plaques include many folkloric and individual elements.

“Remember the Shabbat, to keep it holy.” The high point and ray of hope in the week in the previously not very joyful life of Jews was Shabbat, which is welcomed in “as a bride.” The meal eaten on Friday evening, therefore, is a festive celebration and ritual event at the same time. The lighting of the Shabbat lamp over the table signifies the beginning of the feast day: “Where there is light, there is joy,” is an old Jewish saying. The hanging lamps of bronze and brass, which can be found to this day in many Jewish homes, are generally familiar. Seven, sometimes more branches with oil pans, later candles, are arranged around a central shaft. At the lower end of this, a basin collects the drops of oil. The height of the lamp can be raised and lowered as required by means of a notched bracket. For centuries the same style of lamp remained in use in the East and the West, in the South and in the North.

With the *kiddush*, the prayer over a cup of wine, the Shabbat and other feast days were blessed. A large number of *kiddush* cups have survived in synagogues and private houses. In addition, there are cups used by societies, of which an impressive range of selected examples could be seen at the Millennium Exhibition in Cologne. When a congregation was driven away or else when a family had to emigrate, this valuable treasure was always the easiest to hide and rescue. As a result, relatively early works of art have survived in the West.

The richly worked Renaissance cup with different sections, owned by the Men’s Charitable Society in Worms, is an example of 16<sup>th</sup> century goldsmithery of the highest order. “A mixture of artistic styles as found in the silver pineapple cup and the pewter art cup from Augsburg and Nuremberg”<sup>30</sup> (fig 44). Whether the cups were intended for this use from the outset is uncertain. The frequent occurrence of lions’ heads, a popular decorative element since the Middle Ages in Christian art as well, does not necessarily have any symbolic significance. The Hebrew inscription around the edge may have been added at a later date.

In the case of the cup of the Jewish Society for the Sick in Mainz (fig 38), probably made in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the blank surfaces were covered with inscriptions to such an extent that the beautifully engraved Renaissance ornaments barely come into their own. The inscriptions comprise all the names of members of the society. The date 1765 has nothing to do with when the cup was made.<sup>31</sup>

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30 Heinrich Frauberger, op. cit., II/IV, p. 102.

31 A second hexagonal cup, completely covered with inscriptions, was also in possession of the Men’s Charitable Society, Worms, cf. Salfeld, op. cit.



**fig 38. Silver cup**  
**Jewish Society for the Sick, Mainz**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> half of 17<sup>th</sup> century**



**fig 39. Gilded cup**  
**Mannheim Synagogue**

The gilded, chased cup of the synagogue congregation in Mannheim, on the other hand, was made especially for its specific use (fig 39). Three depictions from the Old Testament: Moses striking water from the rock, Joshua and Caleb with the grapes, and Balaam and the angel, fill the cartouches with strapwork, arcanthus tendrils, and birds decorating the blank spaces. We would have liked to have known the name and background of the master craftsman who created this relief so full of character and the gracious ornamentation so suitably added in moderation. The monogram J.C.G., which appears twice, is the only clue. The silver cup in the synagogue in Deutz, dated 1762, was probably bought from a Christian goldsmith from Augsburg and then engraved with inscriptions and pictures by a Jew who otherwise worked on pewter plates as its has the same coarsely executed, naïve compositions as otherwise found on pewter bowls (fig 40), signs of the Zodiac: Libra, Pisces, Cancer, etc., and repeated depictions of jugs (a Levites feature) in medallions with the names of *chevra* members in Hebrew. By contrast, the oval fields in the tall lidded cup of the synagogue congregation in Bonn, which are set off in silver from the gilded surface of the other areas, were doubtlessly intended to be used for inscriptions from the beginning (fig41). The names of the donor and *chevra* members can be read at the foot: Hindle, daughter of Menachem Halevi, wife of the court banker Ahron Seligmann of Leimen near Heidelberg, donated a magnificent lidded tankard with heavy

Baroque floral reliefs on a gilded background, to Heidelberg Synagogue. This form of *kiddush* cup is rare (fig 42).



**fig 40. Silver cup with signs of the Zodiac**  
**Mark: 1762, Deutz Synagogue**

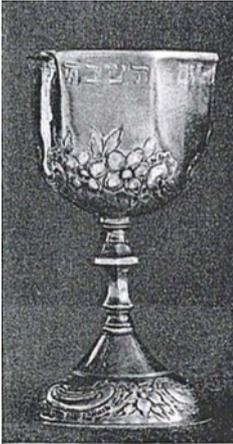


**fig 41. Silver cup with name of donor**  
**Bonn Synagogue**



**fig 42. Tankard with lid with Baroque flowers**  
**Heidelberg Synagogue**

What otherwise West German families display with particular pride as “old” *kiddush* cups, long in the families’ possession, are generally 18<sup>th</sup> century pieces of silverware from Augsburg or Nuremberg, bearing the standard strapwork, rocaille and vegetal ornamentation, the only difference to chalices in the Christian church and other cups in private collections being their Hebrew inscriptions (fig 43, 45).

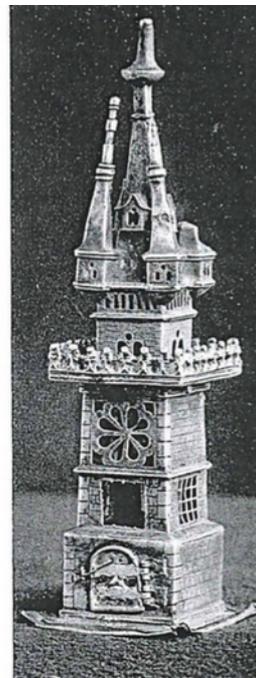
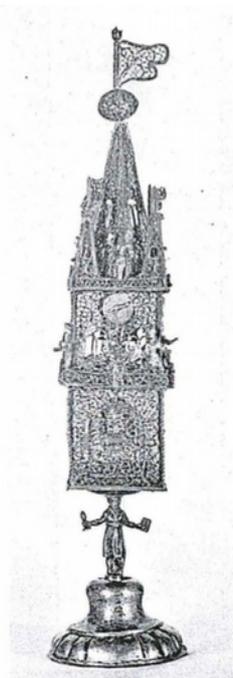


**fig 43. Kiddush cup**  
Mid 18<sup>th</sup> century

**fig 44. Renaissance cup**  
16<sup>th</sup> century, Men's Charitable  
Society, Worms

**fig 45. Kiddush cup**  
c. 1720, Cologne, private  
collection

With the words: “I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord,”<sup>32</sup> the cup is raised at the end of Shabbat—the “Havdalah,” i.e. the symbolic close— as well. It should brim over with wine, a symbol of the pouring out of the blessing.<sup>33</sup> Then the spices are blessed, their scent inhaled by those praying, as if wanting to hold onto the bliss of the Shabbat after its passing.<sup>34</sup> The custom of seeing out the festive day with fragrances comes from an ancient oriental tradition. In barely any other ritual object have artists given rein to their imagination as in the spice or *besamim* boxes (*besamim* = spices), generally referred to in the German-speaking world as *Psombüchsen* or *Psorntürmchen*, with a preference for tower shapes (figs 43–51). Attempts have been made based on the shape of the towers to attribute them to well-known church towers and thus establish their place of origin. However, this readily leads to incorrect conclusions as here, too, it must be taken into consideration that famous models of spice boxes have, over the centuries, long since been removed from the place they were made, altered time and again and decorated with fashionable ornaments. The most bizarre mixture of styles emerged as a result, and well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century reminiscences of Gothic church towers continued to prevail. A word about the techniques used: In this regard one cannot be cautious enough either in defining a work's place of origin based on a certain technique. Filigree towers, for example, as found in the possession of many families in the Rhineland which are extremely precious, noted for their delicacy and transparency and sometimes embellished with small enamel medallions, may have been made just as well in Prague as in Southern Germany or Poland (fig 47).



32 Psalms 116:13.

33 Malachi 3:10.

34 *Jüdisches Lexikon*, vol. II, p. 1463.

**fig 46–48. Small spice towers:**

**left: silver, early 18<sup>th</sup> century, private collection, Neckarbischofsheim; center: silver with filigree work, Schwarzschild Collection, Cologne; right: silver, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Friedberg Synagogue**

The spice tower in Friedberg Synagogue from the 16<sup>th</sup> century is one of the oldest examples known to us (fig 48). The fragrance escapes through lattice openings, rose windows and Gothic twin-arched windows. The imitation of brickwork and roof shingles, the horizontal division with a small gallery and a delicate balustrade, and the positioning of the different stories are proof of the naturalistic and compositional skill of a master craftsman whose name is unfortunately not known.

A twin of this tower is to be found in the Landesmuseum in Kassel. Rudolf Hallo recognizes Kirchheim church tower as the same model in both spice towers from Hesse.<sup>35</sup> A typical example of the stylistic mixture mentioned above is a tower in a private collection in Neckarbischofsheim in which a goldsmith from Nuremberg naively placed a medieval tower on a Regency pedestal (fig 46). A very original and gracious Empire structure (fig 49) terminates in a tower of a different period in a spiral on which a compass dial is fitted.

Spice towers are frequently used for storing Havdalah candles as well which are lit at the end of Shabbat as a reminder of the Creation that began with light (fig 50).

Apart from spice towers which filled the whole room with their fragrances, small scent boxes were also popular which are still to be found in large numbers in old families (fig 51). If these have the shape of smelling salt capsules from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, one should not assume, as Heinrich Frauberger does, that every smelling salt capsule was made for use by Jews. Contemporary portraits show how these perforated, technically refined spherical objects were attached to one end of a rosary and used by Christian women in a church just as much as by Jewish women in a synagogue—especially on the holiest day of the year, the Day of Atonement, as they helped give energy during fasting and acted as a tonic.



**fig 49. *Besamim* tower, Silver, c. 1800  
Owned by *Justizrat* Auerbach, Cologne**



**fig 50. With candle holder, silver, early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Owned by Mrs. Karl W. Simons, Düsseldorf**

35 Rudolf Hallo, op. cit.

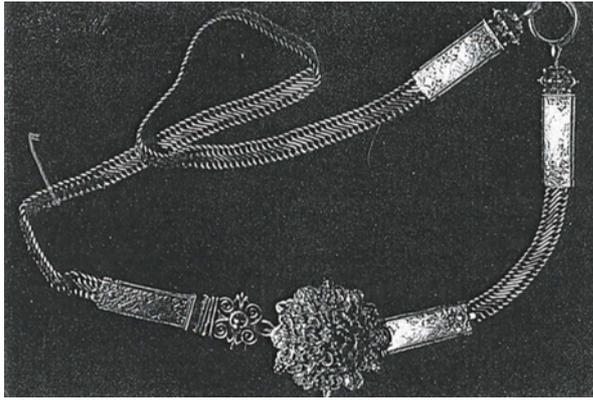


**fig 51. Spice boxes**  
Owned by *San.. Rat* Dr. Moses, Cologne

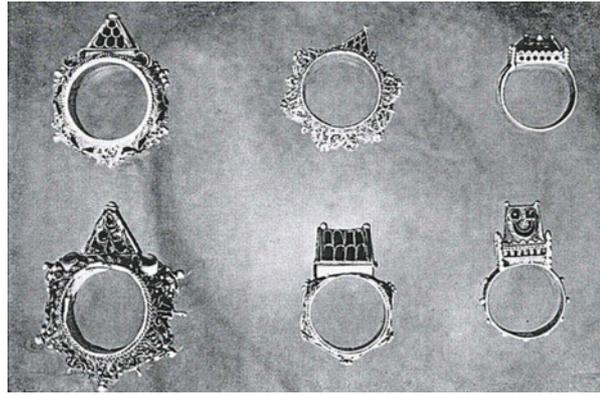


**fig 52. Wedding procession**  
After a watercolor of 1690 in the Jewish Museum, Mainz

Considering the important role which family life has always played among Jews since time immemorial, considerable significance was of course also attached to family celebrations. In small villages the whole community attended a wedding, whether poor or rich. The marriage ceremony itself was and still is officiated under a *chuppah* in the forecourt of the synagogue or later in a temple (fig 52). The *siblonot*—the gift for the bride from the bridegroom—is presented to her by the rabbi or a well-regarded member of the congregation. It is traditionally a silver belt (fig 53). By return, the bridegroom received a belt, among other things, from the mother of the bride.



**fig 53. Bridal belt with silver hallmark from Cologne  
Owned by Mrs. Elise Löb of Worms**



**fig 54. Jewish wedding rings  
Collection of the late court jeweller Louis Koch of Frankfurt a. M.**

An impressive number of such *siblonot* belts has survived in the Rhineland. They are very much in keeping with the times and have no features of any special importance,<sup>36</sup> unlike the wedding rings which bridegrooms placed on the index finger on their brides' right hand during the wedding ceremony. These are among the most elaborate rings created (fig 54). Old traditions were upheld over centuries as well which means that accurate dating is seldom possible. Very few objects have survived, however, from the Middle Ages and determining their place of origin is almost more difficult than in the case of other rings. Most are probably Italian or Southern German. That these rings were not worn is manifest in their unusual shape.

A miniature house on the face of the ring, occasionally supported by cherubim, is a very popular motif, as a reminder of the synagogue or Solomon's Temple. In a small opening in the gable or inside the ring is the inscription: "Mazel tov" = "good fortune." Less frequently found are depictions from the Old Testament which refer to the "First Marriage": the creation of Eve, the Fall, and the Expulsion from Paradise. Filigree work and *émail en ronde bosse* are very much in preference and date from the Renaissance tradition like the very popular embossed humps and floral ornamentation. The wonderful collection of Jewish rings owned by the late court jeweller Loius Koch of Frankfurt, from which several examples are shown here, were displayed at the Millennium Exhibition in Cologne (fig 54).<sup>37</sup>

The marriage contract, the *ketubah*, provided artistic Jewish scribes an occasion to add ornamentation and figurative decorative elements. While Italian *ketubot* are especially elaborate, there are few examples in existence from the Rhineland of outstanding artistic note.

So-called "wedding stones" with hexagrams, against which the bridegroom smashes a glass during the wedding ceremony, are still to be found in Southern German synagogues and in some case in the Rhineland, too.

36 A. Freimann, "Gürtel jüdischer Bräute in Frankfurt a. M.," reprinted from "Einzelforschungen über Kunst und Altertumsgegenstände zu Frankfurt a. M."

37 The collection is soon to be presented in a major publication

With Hanukkah, the meaning of which is explained at the end of the section on synagogue lamps, the series of Jewish festivals begins, especially those which play a role in the domestic household.

The annual festival of Purim on 14 Adar (between February and March), commemorating the deliverance of the Jews through Esther, is similar to the Hanukkah festival in that it is a joyous celebration. Presents in the form of *mishloach manot* are exchanged and gifts given to the poor, as commanded by Mordecai. “And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both nigh and far, to stablish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, as the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.”<sup>38</sup> People sing and eat a celebratory meal together; even a slight state of inebriation is permitted. People dance and dress in fancy costumes; and this merriment, which takes place on the street in the East, is very reminiscent of our Rhineland carnival, even taking place at the same time of year. The central and most festive moment of this feast day is the reading from the Megillah, the Book of Esther, in the evening and in the morning in the synagogue and incidentally also in the home.

The Megillah, meaning the “scroll,” has, like the Torah and as the name implies, the same form and, if used in synagogues, has to be written by hand and free of decoration and pictorial depictions. That is not the case for *megillot* used in the private home (figs 55–58). Here, the exuberant celebration of the feast day is reflected in rich ornamentation, bright colors, and frequently in humorous tales from the *Legende R. Wischnitzer-Bernstein* in M.S. 74, yr. 1930, p. 381 ff. While columns were left for the text which always had to be written by hand, pen-and-ink drawings and paintings often vied for space with copperplate engravings and woodcuts from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward. There are a number of beautiful examples owned by families in the Rhineland. These are, however, all imports from Spain and Italy, from Holland and Southern Germany. Whether the Rhineland made any contribution at all to this chapter of Jewish book illustration is questionable. When Heinrich Frauberger published a large number of *megillot* in 1909 for the first time,<sup>39</sup> he was very cautious in defining their place and date of origin. Art-historical research has unfortunately not advanced much in this field since then and still has to make do with hypotheses, as the lack of signatures, a pronounced lean toward the archaic, the adoption of motifs from paintings in copperplate engraving and vice versa, all make precise statements exceptionally difficult (fig 57, 58). Apart from *megillot*, a number of so-called Purim plates made of pewter, connected to the feast day, have survived and can be found in the homes of local families.

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38 Esther 9:20 ff.

39 op. cit., vol. V/VI, p. 9 ff.



fig 55. Megillah with silver sleeve  
Schwarzschild Collection, Cologne



fig 56. Megillah with silver sleeve  
16<sup>th</sup> century  
Schwarzschild Collection, Cologne



fig 57. Megillah with copperplate engravings  
18<sup>th</sup> century  
Schwarzschild Collection, Cologne

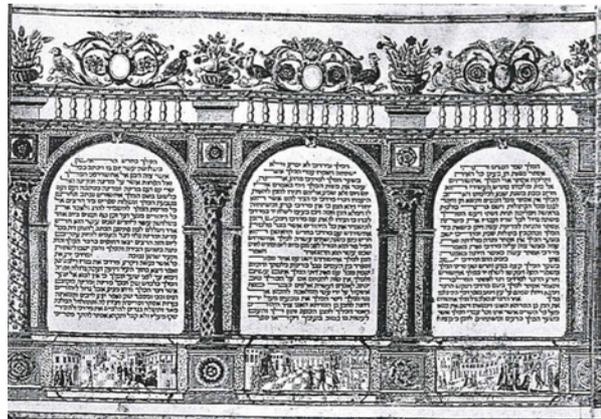


fig 58. Megillah  
Parchment with colored illustrations  
Probably Italy, 16<sup>th</sup> century

In spring, the memory of the fortunate liberation from the land of Egypt is celebrated at Pesach. Pesach means “gently pass over” as death passed by the houses of the Israelites which had been marked with the blood of the Easter lamb. The customs with which the table is set for the feast on Seder evening and which are to be observed in a specific order within the family (*seder* means “order”), have never been as poetically described or their mysticism or so well captured as in Heinrich Heine’s *The Rabbi of Bacharach*: “As soon as it is dark the lady of the house lights the lamps, spreads the tablecloth, places in its midst three plates of unleavened bread, covers them with a napkin, and places on the pile six little dishes containing symbolical food, that is, an egg, lettuce, horse-radish, the bone of a lamb, and a brown mixture of raisins, cinnamon, and nuts. At this table the father of the family sits among relations and friends, and reads to them from a very curious book called the *Agade*, whose contents are a strange mixture of legends of their forefathers, wondrous tales of Egypt, questions of theology, prayers, and festival songs. During this feast there is a grand supper, and even during the reading there is tasting of the symbolic food and nibbling of Passover bread, while four cups of red wine are drunk. Mournfully merry, seriously gay, and mysteriously secret as some dark old legend is the character of this nocturnal festival, and the usual traditional singing intonation with which the *Agade* is read by the father, and now and then re-echoed in chorus by the hearers, at one time thrills the inmost soul as with a shudder, anon calms it as if it were a mother’s lullaby, and anon startles it so suddenly into waking that even those Jews who have long fallen away from the faith of their fathers and run after strange joys and honors, are moved to their very hearts when by chance the old well-known tones of the Passover songs ring in their ears.”

For a Jewish housewife, the elaborate decoration of the *seder* table is something of which she is especially proud. This comprises a generally brightly colored, embroidered tablecloth and the silver cups and plates for the symbolic dishes, in particular. The most important item is the *seder* plate on which *mazzot* (unleavened loaves) are placed. The more wealthy use a silver plate, less often one of china; in most cases it is made of pewter. These engraved pewter plates represent a refreshingly unadulterated form of folk art with a confident feeling for the decoration of the surface areas (fig59).<sup>40</sup> In these cases there is no specific western or even Rhineland style either. Once again there are few examples from before the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The decoration is generally related to the festival: there is an Easter lamb, *mazzot*, and the date of the holiday is emphasized by the signs of the Zodiac or else a scene from the Flight out of Egypt is created.

Dishes for other symbolic items are smaller in size due to the precious metals used and their delicate execution. Very often these are vessels originally made for another purpose and only later used for rituals, e.g. bowls for radishes, parsley, etc.

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40 op. cit., vol. V/VI, p. 9 ff.



fig 59. Seder plates  
Pewter, Rheinisches Museum, Cologne



fig 60. Dish for the egg, dated 1621

For the egg which acts as a reminder of the second sacrifice, specially shaped bowls are used such as the small, elegant, silver object from a private collection in Cologne, which displays a coat of arms among other things. It may have been a gift from a princely ruler to a court Jew and bears the date 1621 (fig 60). For *charošet*, a paste made of figs, nuts, almonds, cinnamon, and wine, which acts as a reminder of the clay Jews used during their slavery in Egypt to make bricks, the preference is for a wheelbarrow shape.



**fig 61. Seder cloth, 18<sup>th</sup> century**  
Owned by San. Rat Dr. Moses of Cologne

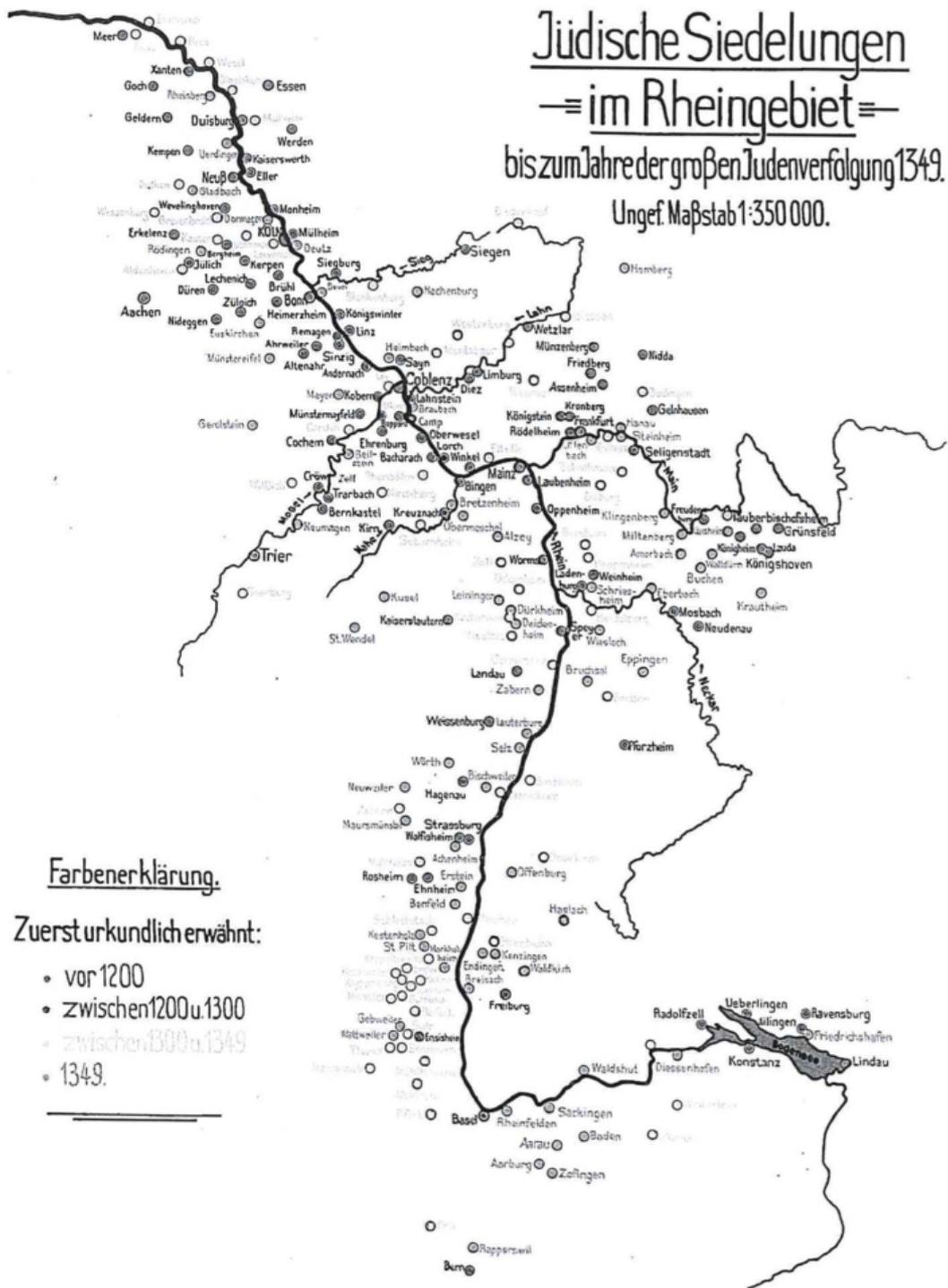


**fig 62. Cushion for the seder evening**  
Linen with colored silk embroidery  
Owned by the Trier congregation

Apart from the richly embroidered tablecloth, other textiles specifically made for the *seder* festival and which refer to this in the imagery used, include the cloth (fig 62), decorated with lace and embroidery which is placed over the *mazzot* during the readings from the Haggadah, and the cushion for the man of the house (fig 61). In addition to Adam and Eve, hunt scenes popular in the Haggadah are also often found.

The most important element of the *seder* celebration is the “adventure-filled book” already mentioned, the Haggadah = tales of the Exodus from Egypt, of thousand-fold suffering, and thousand-fold protection given by God. It first appeared as a book in its own right in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE and was subsequently embellished in form and content in various ways so that several groups and people can

be clearly differentiated. It is not possible here to go into more detail about this diversity even on a superficial level. Instead, a few rare, especially outstanding and important manuscripts should be mentioned in this context.



Jewish settlements in the Rhineland up until the major persecution of Jews in 1349.  
Scale approx. 1'350000.

Explanation of colors

First mentioned in documents:

- before 1200
- between 1200 and 1300
- between 1300 and 1349
- 1349

Jewish settlements in the Rhineland up until the major persecution of Jews in 1349.

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*(Translation: Christopher Wynne)*