

On the Occasion of the Opening of the Art Collection of the Jewish Community Berlin¹

by Moritz Stern

Berlin has been enriched by a new place of cultural-historical interest. A Jewish museum has opened its gates. With pleasure, I follow the invitation to inform also the readers of this magazine about the latest treasure of the entire Jewish community.



Vestibule of the Art Collection of the Jewish Community Berlin

Phot. M. Mandowsky, Berlin

Albert Wolf² in Dresden (died in 1907), no stranger to “Ost und West”—the year’s issues of 1903 include his essay “Daniel Chodowiecki and Moses Mendelssohn”—was known as collector of Jewish antiquities and art objects. Filled with love and enthusiasm for Judaism, he spared no time, effort, or expenses to increase his collection. He made it his life’s sacred mission to prevent the testimonies of Jewish art and cultural activities, as far as they were still available for purchase, from being squandered or even wrecked. Thus, coins, medals, seals, stamps, all kinds of art- and ritual devices, copper engravings, drawings, photographs, illustrated manuscripts, autographs, rare writings for special occasions and prints piled up in his house. He did not collect all these valuable items to flaunt

1 Stern, Moritz: Zur Eroeffnung der Kunstsammlung der Juedischen Gemeinde zu Berlin, in: Ost und West. Illustrierte Monatsschrift für das gesamte Judentum, vol. 17, no. 3–4 (March–April 1917), pp. 89–96.

2 See my remarks in “Albert Wolf. Ein Gedenkblatt,” Berlin 1917, “Hausfreund” publishers.

them or to delight in their possession in an egoistic manner. He placed them at the service of Judaism. He felt the urge to show what the world owes Jewish culture, how even in the unnoticed field of art Jews had major accomplishments. Unselfishly, he loaned his treasures to scholars and quite a few of them spent joyful hours of artistic bliss in Wolf's hospitable home.

Yet, Wolf was not satisfied with solely collecting and exhibiting his precious objects, he also proceeded to scientifically analyze and publish them. Under David Kaufmann's influence, the collector gradually turned into a scholar whom we owe many an important essay. The history of Jewish artists was first investigated by him, the Jewish seals and medallions were described by him in context. The most significant deed of his life, however, was the decision to keep his copious collection from being divided and to safeguard it for the future and preserve it for the general public. He donated it to the Berlin Jewish Community as he was convinced that here the means would be found to shape the collection in an organic and generous manner, and because in his mind, only the capital of the German Empire was the suitable site where from a museum of Jewish art, abundant blessing would arise for Jewry and humankind.

Albert Wolf's goals begin to become reality. The Berlin Jewish Community has taken over the splendid legacy, organized it, further expanded it through loans and acquisitions, and presented it to the public on February 18 of this year. The "Art Collection of the Jewish Community Berlin (Wolf Foundation)" is accommodated in the first administrative building (Oranienburger Str. 29) and open to the public free of charge on Sundays and Wednesdays from 10 am – 1 pm. Because of space limitations, only part of the collection is exhibited for now; however, through annually changing exhibitions the entire holdings shall be gradually presented to the visitor. In case the collection attracts stronger interest—there can be no doubt in this regard—the community board has envisaged larger premises. Already now, individuals, schools, and associations display vigorous interest in visiting the collection. The public's interest has manifested itself also in the fact that since the opening, a number of additional antiquities and art objects have been donated to the Art Collection.

The current exhibition³ includes:

Palestinian antiquities.

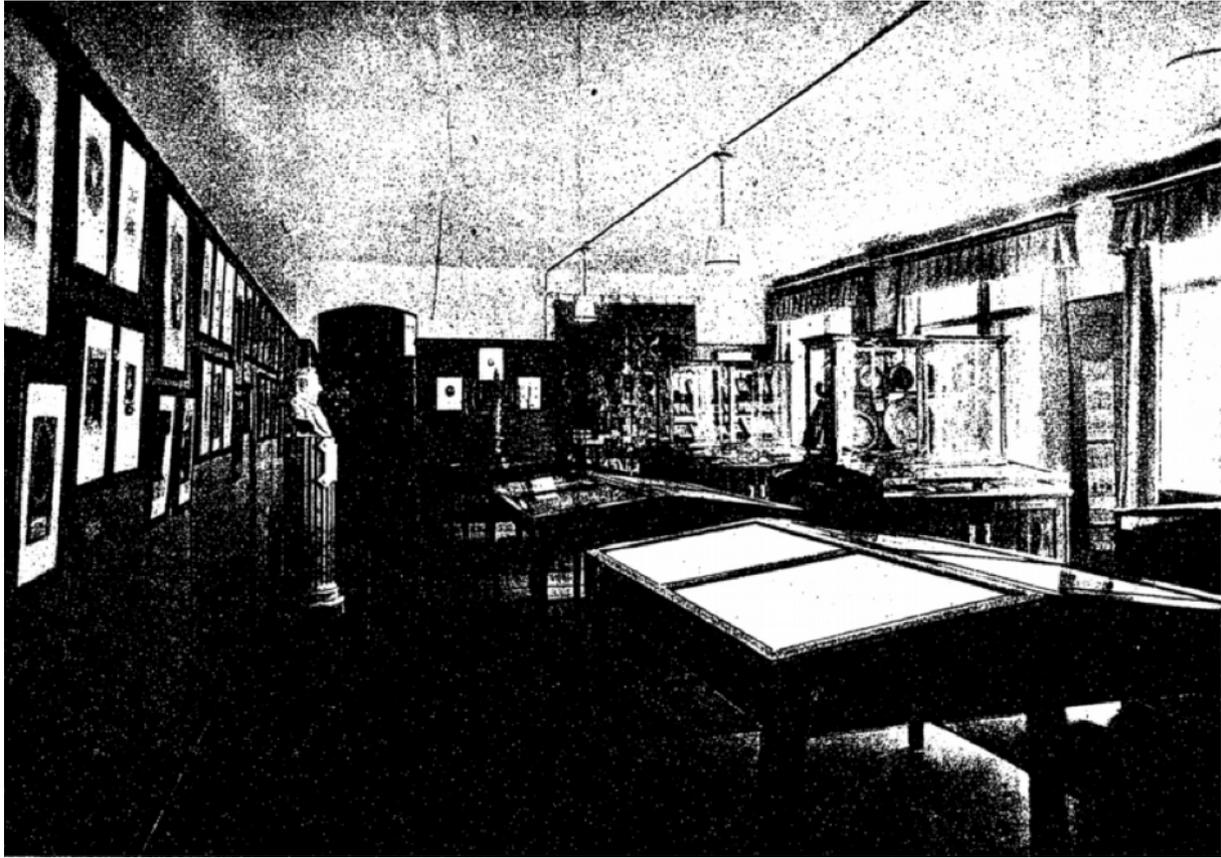
Coins from antiquity.

Medals from the 16th century onward.

Seals and signets.

Ritual and art-and-crafts objects: kiddush- and havdalah cups, spice containers, Seder- and Purim plates, Hannukah lamps, Shabbat candlesticks, tablecloths, prayer desks, Torah wimpels, Torah curtains, Torah pointers, shofars, circumcision instruments, rings, etc.

³ See my report on the first exhibition at the Art Collection of the Jewish Community Berlin, Berlin 1917.



Main hall of Art Collection of the Jewish Community Berlin
Phot. M. Mindovskv, Berlin

Portraits of notable personalities in Judaism from the 16th until the beginning of the 19th century in copper engraving, mezzotint, and drawing.

Illustrated manuscripts: Hebrew prayer books, Esther scrolls, Passover Haggadoth, marriage contracts, doctoral diplomas, decorative sheets, etc.

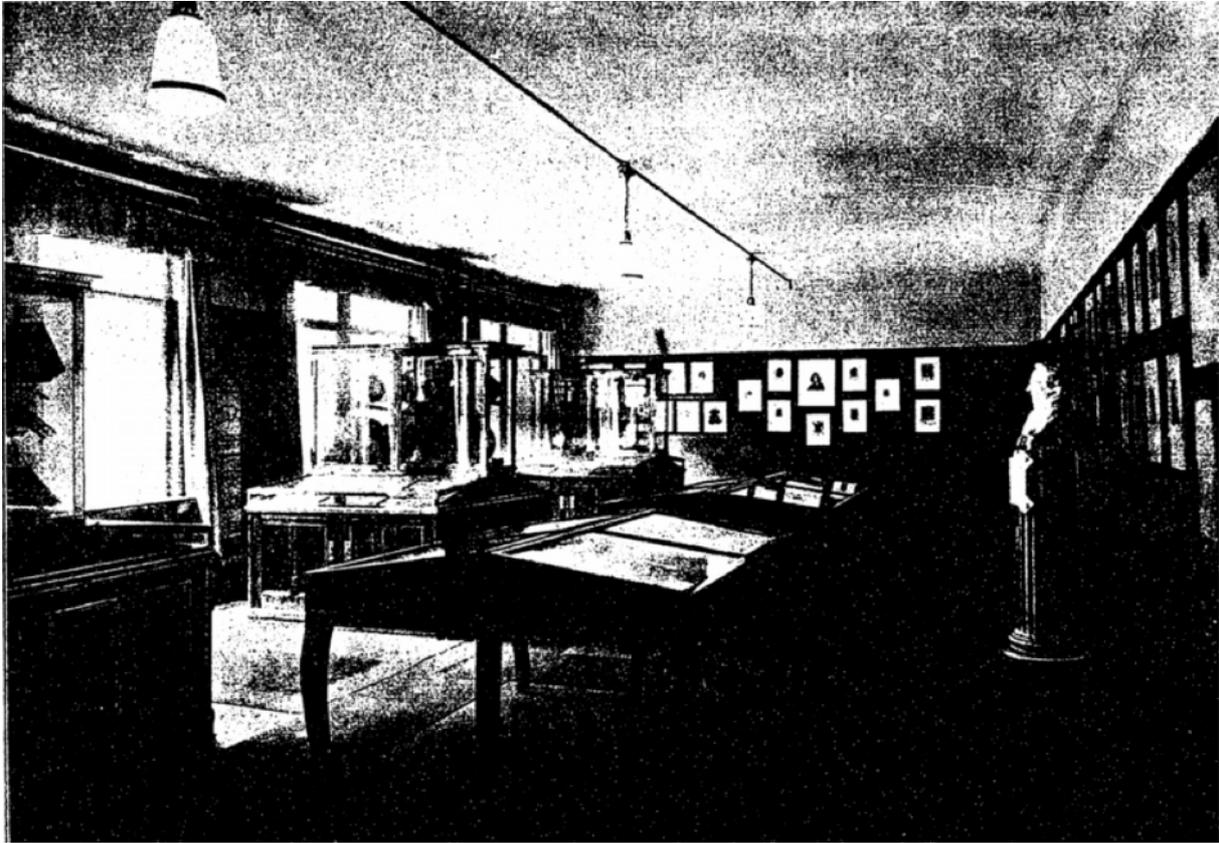
Bible- and Talmud manuscripts, original and collotype.

Illustrated prints: 42 lines of a Gutenberg Bible from 1450 in multicolor collotype, Margaritha: Der ganze jüdische Glaube (The entire Jewish belief) 1530, Passover Haggadoth from 1630 onward, Leon Templo: depiction of Solomon's Temple 1642, etc.

Rare books: Hebrew incunables 1480 to 1490, German Bible 1483, Hebrew Bible 1517, writings by Reuchlin on the Hebrew language 1506 —1518, writings on the Reuchlin-Pfefferkorn dispute 1508—1521.

The exhibited holdings are situated in a vestibule full of atmosphere and in a main hall, partially on the walls, partially in glass cabinets and showcases. Nobody will pass by the valuable coin collection without any educational benefit. This is excellent illustrative material for the study of Jewish history

and suitably complements, from a scholarly perspective, similar public collections. Even more valuable is the medal collection, which leads us from the beginning of the 16th century into the present and represents in its entirety a possession that otherwise cannot be found in any museum in so complete a manner. Undeniably, this is already an attraction in itself.



**Main hall of Art Collection of the Jewish Community Berlin
Phot. M. Mindovskv, Berlin**

Among the ceremonial objects, the loans from the Heideuteurgasse Synagogue deserve particular emphasis: a large Hannukah lamp from 1713 and a Torah curtain from 1764; additionally, a silk carpet from 1590, a gift from King Frederick William I on the occasion of the Synagogue's inauguration in 1714, which has been used ever since as Torah curtain as well. The last item, which only now has been truly recognized, is a work of art distinguished by age and beauty; in its exquisitely preserved colorfulness, it delights eye and heart of the beholder.

The most valuable illustrated manuscript contains Pentateuch verses with 122 colorized pen and ink drawings from the 16th century from Northern Italy. Originating from here are also handwritten Machzor sheets with splendid, gold-coated colorful initials. Three sheets are from Wolf, seven others were donated following the first visit to the Collection by a participant of the inauguration ceremony who wishes to remain unnamed. A marvel of calligraphy is a transcript of the Kabbalist work *Etz Hayyim* by Hayyim Vital with adorned letters and numerous full-page pen and ink drawings.

Represented in the row of portraits, we find illustrious names such as Zacutus Lusitanus, Joseph Salomo Delmedigo, Leon Templo, Manasse ben Israel, Baruch Spinoza, Isaak Aboab, Jacob Sasportas, Zebi Hirsch Aschkenasi (Chacham Zebi), Salomo Salem, Saul Löwenstamm, Arje Breslau, Sabbato Marini, Moses Gomes de Mesquita, David Oppenheimer, Jonathan Eybeschütz, Ezechiel Landau, Hirschel Levin, Moses Mendelssohn, Salomon Maimon, Marcus Herz, David Friedländer, Hartwig Wessely, Salomo Dubno, Herz Homberg, Abraham Furtado, Joseph Sintzheim, Abraham de Cologna, Israel Jacobson, Löb Berlin, and Meyer Simon Weyl. At the center, portraits of Mendelssohn grace this proud line of ancestors of Jewish intellect, especially his oil painting created by the Berlin Academy's director Johann Christoph Frisch, the best portrait we have of Mendelssohn, and which was considered lost until now. Since 1840, it has been in the ownership of the Jewish Community and was thought to be a work by Graff. Next to Frisch' wonderful work of art is Johann Peter Anton Tassaert's masterpiece: Mendelssohn's marble bust, featuring Ramler's inscription on its pedestal:

MOSES MENDELSSOHN
BORN IN DESSAU
IN 1729
OF JEWISH PARENTS.
A SAGE LIKE SOCRATES
TRUE TO THE ANCESTORS' LAWS
TEACHING IMMORTALITY
AND IMMORTAL LIKE HIM.

This is a silent place of art appreciation. The same is altogether true for the entire exhibition. Everybody will emerge from it in an elevated state of mind and spiritually refreshed. Yet, the most important thing remains the ample blessing of instruction it bestows. May the Art Collection also in its further expansion contribute to the better knowledge of Jewish history and culture and have part in the appreciation of Judaism. Then, the name of its founder, Albert Wolf, and the name of the community that guards and cares for his legacy will be blessed by future generations.

(Translation: Lilian Dombrowski)