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## Ceremonial Objects from the Collection of Rabbi David A. Whiman

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CEREMONIAL OBJECTS  
FROM THE COLLECTION OF  
RABBI DAVID A. WHIMAN



An Exhibit at the Gould Law Library,  
Touro College Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center  
2009/2010



“... Jewish life is filled with ceremonies from the cradle to the grave, from dawn to dusk, through all the seasons of the year. Many of these rituals call for ceremonial objects.”<sup>1</sup>

“The commandment of *hiddur mitzvah* states that beautifying the objects we use to perform Jewish duties adds a spiritual richness to our observance. The rabbis derived this from the poem “The Song of the Sea” which Moses sang immediately after the people fled Egypt: “This is my G-d, and I will glorify him!” (Exod. 15:2)”<sup>2</sup>

“Basing their work on the principle of *hiddur mitzvah* - beautifying the commandment - Jewish and non-Jewish craftsmen have, over the centuries, worked in metal, wood, ceramics, and textiles, and written books and manuscripts, to create objects integral to Jewish practice. The desire to express love for G-d by making ceremonial objects is as ancient as Judaism itself. Nothing is made for decorative purposes alone: every piece has a religious function. For that reason, many items of Judaica wear their history, showing signs of regular use in a way that purely ornamental objects do not.”<sup>3</sup>

This exhibit at the Gould Law Library features vintage ceremonial objects from the collection of Rabbi David A. Whiman. It includes items made from a variety of materials for use in the synagogue or the home - all exemplifying the concept of *hiddur mitzvah*. We are grateful to Rabbi Whiman for sharing these beautiful objects with us, and we hope that all those who visit the exhibit will find it to be a rich and rewarding experience.



**Rabbi David A. Whiman** is the Senior Rabbi at North Shore Synagogue in Syosset, NY. Before coming to North Shore, he was Senior Rabbi of Temple Shalom in Newton, Massachusetts, and Congregation Beth Israel in Houston, Texas. Rabbi Whiman, a native of Norfolk, Virginia, graduated from the College of William and Mary. Following graduation, he was commissioned an officer in the United States Navy. He was ordained from the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1979. He completed his Doctorate from Andover Newton Theological School. He has a particular interest in organizational learning and change management. He is co-author of *LEARNING WHILE LEADING: INCREASING*

*EFFECTIVENESS IN MINISTRY*. He is acknowledged as a creative and challenging speaker. In 2001 he was invited to preach at Harvard University’s Memorial Church, in 2002 he was the first Rabbi to address the Episcopal Church’s House of Bishops, and he delivered the Baccalaureate sermon at Commencement Exercises at his alma mater. Rabbi Whiman is committed to lifelong Jewish learning. He directed the Religious School at Temple Shalom for seven years, and he is a three-time recipient of the National Association of Temple Educator’s Hillel Gamoran award for creative programming. His Newton congregation was a member of the first round of Reform congregations to participate in the movement’s Experiment in Congregational Education. He has taught widely in both Jewish and Christian settings. In Houston, he served on the board of the Institute of Religion and was instrumental in setting up a citywide Jewish-Christian dialogue. He has taught at Boston College, Andover Newton, Rice University, and Brandeis University. Rabbi Whiman is an avid collector of antique Judaica. His collection of synagogue carvings and ritual objects has been displayed throughout the country and was featured in the exhibit *Gilded Lions and Jeweled Horses* at the American Museum of Folk Art in New York City.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Wimpel (Torah Binder)



The wimpel was made for Claude Raymond Mengal, born 25 January 1922, Alsace. The 8' long band is stencil painted in a folk art motif. The decorations include a dove bearing a wreath, with the wreath surrounding a Star of David that includes the word *mazal*; a star with center circles; the Two Tablets with a crown on top and a small star underneath; a huppah; and a flower. The multi-colored text reads: Abraham, son of R[eb] Weiss, born the 25<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, 5682. May G-d raise him to Torah, to huppah, and to good deeds. Amen. Selah.

A wimpel (from Old German: bewimfen - to cover or conceal) is a cloth binder formed from the swaddling cloth used during the circumcision rite - a tradition started in 16<sup>th</sup> century Germany. After being separated into strips, the cloth was sewn together to form a long band. It was embroidered or painted with the boy's name his father's name, his birth date, and a form of the blessing used in the circumcision ceremony. Eventually it came to include pictures that were illustrative of the blessing, as well floral designs or zodiac symbols. The wimpel was usually presented to the synagogue on the occasion of the boy's first visit or first haircut, and it was later used as the Torah binder at his Bar Mitzvah.

## 2. Ner Tamid (Eternal Light/Lamp)

The eternal light is from the Lower East Side, New York City. It is made of gilt over copper, along with other metals. The lamp is suspended from a piece that is shaped like a type of crown. The chains, made of alternating geometric forms, attach to the bowl with scrollwork armatures. The bowl is hammered. A pendant hangs under the bowl. (The light may have been adapted from its original purpose.)



The *Ner Tamid* is a perpetually burning lamp that is usually suspended in front of the Ark, but it may sometimes be located in a niche. It represents the menorah that stood in the Temple in Jerusalem. It is symbolic of G-d's presence and of His covenant with the Jewish people.

Leviticus 24:2: "Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause a lamp to burn continually."

## 3. Wall Sconce

The nickel plated sconce holds two candles, and is adorned with rampant lions. British, probably 19<sup>th</sup> Century.



#### 4. Sabbath Lights

The Sabbath is welcomed by the woman of the house as she kindles the Sabbath lights. Tradition requires that at least two candles are lit. The three exhibited candelabra are cast brass. All have large circular bases. The candle holders and the drip pans, as well as some decorative elements, are attached using screws. The branches are screwed into the bases.

- A. Four light candelabra, Austro-Hungarian. The finial of this 21" tall piece is a crowned eagle. Florets are attached to the front and back.



- B. Austro-Hungarian four light candelabra, probably late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The finial is a crowned double-headed eagle over a scrolled framework. The 27" tall piece stands on claw feet.



The eagle and the double-headed eagle are recognized as symbols of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, but both also have special meanings in Jewish art. The eagle is a symbol of power and strength, and a double-headed eagle also represents the dualism of G-d's grace and judgment. The crowns above eagles' heads indicate kingliness, Torah, and the priesthood.<sup>5</sup>

- C. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century three light candelabra from Poland. The branches feature lions over scrollwork. On one side the lions are engraved with the blessing "To kindle a Sabbath light," and on the other, "To kindle a holiday light." The piece is 18" tall.



The lion is a frequent motif in Jewish ritual art. (See #6C.)

## 5. Gilded Lions and Jeweled Horses

Zimiles, Murray. *Gilded Lions and Jeweled Horses: the Synagogue to the Carousel*. Project coordinator, Stacy C. Hollander; with an essay by Vivian B. Mann; foreword by Gerard C. Wertkin. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press; Hanover: Published by University Press of New England in association with the American Folk Art Museum, c2007.

The book is a companion work to the exhibit of the same name held Oct. 2, 2007, to Mar. 23, 2008, at the American Folk Art Museum, NY; and May 24 to Sept. 1, 2008, at the Fenimore Art Museum, New York State Historical Association, and the Farmers' Museum, Inc., Cooperstown, NY. Several of Rabbi Whiman's pieces were included in the exhibits.

## 6. Synagogue Carvings

- A. Small gilded and painted (red) wood crown, probably Danzig, Germany, 1840s.



- B. Large gilded and painted (red) wood crown, Lower East Side New York, 1920s.



The crown, often borne between two lions as a symbol of strength, represents the “majestic sovereignty of the Law.”<sup>6</sup>

- C. Gilded wood lion, Lower East Side, New York City, likely part of a pediment.



“The lion is the emblem of strength, courage, and majesty.”<sup>7</sup> The lion is associated with Judah and with the House of David.

- D. A painted and gilded wood plaque, European, white background with a shield draped in blue-green with letters representing the Crown of G-d's Kingdom, the whole surmounted by a gilded and painted (red) crown, with a leaf motif on each side.



- E. Painted and gilded piece; American, Lower East Side, New York City, Priestly hands holding a crown surmounted by an urn.



“The motif of hands reaching for the light or the crown, symbolizing the earth and the celestial, is widespread in Jewish art. In many cases, the palms symbolize the priestly benediction ....”<sup>8</sup>

## 7. Havdalah Containers

The *Havdalah* (separation) ceremony marks the end of the Sabbath or festival and the beginning of the regular week. There are four blessings, including those over wine, over aromatic spices, and over a light in the form of a braided candle. The spices are kept in special containers, sometimes called besamin, hadas, or spice boxes or towers, and, as these are passed around, the fragrances remind everyone of the sweetness of the Sabbath. Spice containers have been made in many shapes, but the one used most often is the tower form reminiscent of the fortified towers of medieval Europe.

- A. Silver spice tower, 10” tall, worked completely in filigree from the top to the base. A ball tops a four-sided tapered spire over two bulbous sections sandwiching a narrow central spice segment. The hinged door opens down to reveal the spices stored inside. The lower sections are shaped with leaf-like patterns and form half-round, round, and half-round segments. Nearly all the edges feature a rope detail. The assay mark Sterling is stamped on the square base.





- B. Silver spice tower, about 8" tall. A pennant flies above a square tapered spire over a "roof" stamped to look like tile. The square central section has a brick pattern. It is fitted with a hinged door, stamped with straps, that opens to reveal the spices inside. The stem widens into a flattened bulb over a footed section formed of leaves. A half-dome under the leaves sits over a square base. A maker's mark of the letter W inside a square and the number 12 in what appears to be a double circle are stamped on the base. The number 12 may be an assay mark for 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany or Prussia.



- C. Silver spice tower, 12" tall, probably Polish. The pennant on the top of the spire sits on a ball. The section below is a tapered footed spire. The three cylindrical middle sections are engraved with a stylized pattern of flowers and leaves. The hinged door is located in the bottom cylinder. The central section sits atop a half-dome over a round stem that connects to a round stepped base. The tower is stamped with a 12 that may be the assay mark. The stamped marker's mark appears to be the letter R with an embellishment on the side.



- C. Silver spice tower, 9" tall, possibly Polish, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. A conical spire, topped by a ball, is missing a pennant. The top cylindrical section is engraved with a design of the Two Tablets supported by rampant lions. The filigree central section, made to hold spices, is fitted with a door. The stem attaches to a stepped circular base. On the base are worn maker's marks on either side of a script letter E. The E may be the assay mark for Krakow.



- E. Silver/brass spice tower. A tapering spire is topped by a ball, but is missing a pennant. The central spice section is a stamped and cut-out square, fitted with a door. The section has loops for pennants at the top corners and loops for bells at the bottom corners. Only one pennant remains. The stem widens into a bulb, and then narrows to a circular base. This 8" tall item is European, probably late 19<sup>th</sup> century.





- F. Silver spice tower, 10" tall, probably 19<sup>th</sup> century. Five square and tapered spires top this tower. The tallest flies a pennant set on a ball. It also has oval cartouches on each side. The spires have cut-outs that simulate windows or doors. A pierced balustrade separates the top from the center section. The center section is patterned on all sides by wreaths with pierced centers. The door fully covers one side. Four pendant bells are attached to the corners of this section. The stem and foot are patterned. A maker's mark - a triangle with the letter A over the letter G within - is stamped on the base next to a worn design that may be an assay or city mark. This tower is an exact copy of a spice tower now in the Jewish Museum in Paris. That tower is part of a collection on loan from the Musée de Cluny that is considered to be one of the earliest, if not the earliest, collection of Judaica assembled for display.



- G. Rosewater Sprinkler. This Moroccan sprinkler from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is silver plated brass. The maker's name, Mohammed Tahiri, and the city, Fes, appear on the bottom. The sprinklers are not used as often as other containers.



## 8. Wooden Finials

- A. Three American-made finials from Torah spindles. Two are partly made of carved and decorated ivory. The lovely painted finial, adapted for use as a mezuzah, was carried aboard the space shuttle Columbia in 1993.



The wooden spindles to which Torah scrolls are attached are called *atzei chaim*, or "trees of life."

- B. A group of Italian-made finials for *Megillat Ester* (Scroll of Esther). One of the wooden scroll rollers is complete, and the ties that attach the scroll to the roller are visible.



The *Megillah*, or the Book of Esther, tells the story of Esther, who saved her people when they were threatened with extermination by an enemy in the Persian Empire. It is the basis for the festival of *Purim*.

## 9. Silver Finials (Rimmonim)

Finials such as these are placed atop the staves of Torah scrolls. Rimmon means pomegranate in Hebrew, and many Torah finials are formed in the shape of pomegranates. Some rimmonim are hung with bells that tinkle as the Torah is carried. The bells may be reminiscent of the bells worn by Aaron, the High Priest.



Two silver presentation rimmonim, possibly Austro-Hungarian, 12" tall. Each is topped with a crown, and one of the pair has a dove hovering over the crown. Small bells are suspended below the crowns. The middle section of each is open-work, with a leaf pattern and with pendant bells. The bulbous stems have both floral and geometric patterns. The stems are set on domed circular bases. The Hebrew engravings on the bases mark the presentation. One is engraved with the words "*L'zecher neshama ha-isha*" (in memory of the soul of a woman). The other is translated "In memory of Sarah Hannah, daughter of Simha Siegel, may her soul be bound in the bond of everlasting life." There are marks stamped on the base of one of the finials. The first is a cartouche containing the words Fratu Bloch. Another stamp - AR15 - is stamped over and obscures yet another stamp.

## 10. Torah Mantles

"The Torah mantle, protective and also beautiful, is one of the accessories that serve to focus attention on the holiest object in the synagogue. It developed in literal obedience to the Talmudic admonition to have a beautiful scroll of the Law prepared, copied by an able scribe with fine ink and fine calamus, and wrapped in beautiful silks. In the Ashkenazic synagogue the mantle is a sheath, open at the bottom and closed at the top except for two circular apertures for the *etz hayyim*."<sup>9</sup>

- A. Red European Torah mantle embroidered with gold cord. The crown at the top is flanked by the Hebrew letters representing the phrase "Crown of Torah." Under the crown is the inscription: Given by Michael Weiss and partner (wife) Feiga, who see the goodness of their son, the youth Yonah, chosen by G-d, in honor of his wedding, precious of G-d. The mantle is decorated with a beaded flower wreath. [Date according to our reckoning] 5688/1928. Note: the year represents the phrase "it will bring forth flowers."



- B. Ecru silk brocade European mantle, with gold embroidery. The crown at the top, flanked by the Hebrew letters representing the phrase "Crown of Torah," is embroidered in maroon and gold. The mantle is inscribed: This is a gift in honor of the Torah given by Gershon Shakamperal, precious in the eyes of G-D, and his partner (wife Gittel). May they continue in a good life. [Date according to our reckoning] 5638/1878.



- C. Cream silk velvet mantle, from Europe, with raised gold wire embroidery. At the top, a crown, embroidered in red, green, and gold, flanked by the Hebrew letters representing the phrase "Crown of Torah." Under the crown, encircled by a wreath, is the dedication: In honor of the Torah, Sir Yehudah Wyler, precious of G-D, with his partner (wife) Hannah, may we prosper. [In the year of the Torah being honored.] Part of the date is missing, but it was probably made during the late 1800s.



- D. Royal blue silk velvet mantle from Hungary, with raised gold and silver wire embroidery. The front is



decorated with a representation of the entrance to the Temple. The pillars Jachin and Boaz flank the entrance. A flower and grapevine motif is underneath. A crown flanked by the Hebrew letters representing the phrase “Crown of Torah,” is within the archway, followed by this inscription: From Gadiel, the son of Joseph and Mrs. Nehama Toyb, of blessed memory, and my beloved and modest Mrs. Rivka, the daughter of Mordecai Hirsch of blessed memory and Mrs. Livla Miller, may she continue to live. [Date according to our reckoning] 5642/1882.

## 11. Havdalah Plates

- A. Porcelain Havdalah plate, with a scalloped edge, made to hold the Kiddush cup. Written in gold around



the outer rim of the plate, in Hebrew, is the last part of Psalm 19:9: “the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes,” together with a black and gold grape leaf design. Within a gold Star of David in the center of the plate, in Yiddish, are the words Good Week and Good Year. A pattern of grape leaves, in gold and black, fill the spaces between the points of the Star. On the back of the plate, within a cartouche, stands a lion over the letters L.H.S. The name of the maker, Hutschenreuther Gelb (of Selb, Germany) appears above the cartouche, and the word Bavaria appears below.

- B. Porcelain Havdalah plate from the 20s or 30s, with a gold trimmed scalloped edge, made to hold the



Kiddush cup. The phrase Good Sabbath, in Yiddish, appears around the rim in gold, along with two grapevine patterns. The red pattern in the middle of the plate includes a Star of David surrounding a wine cup with grapevine patterns on the outside of the Star. The logo for Villeroy & Boch, Dresden, stamped in gold, appears on the back, as well as the stamp Kaufmand & Co. Buchnandling, Frankfurt a M., Schillerstrasse 19. A lozenge with the designations P, F3, 4 ½, is also impressed on the back.

## 12. Challah Platter

Contemporary silver platter with the two loaves embossed in the center. On one side the words “In honor of the holy Sabbath,” and on the other, “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.”



The braided double bread loaf called challah, eaten on the Sabbath and on holidays, is a reminder of the manna from heaven that sustained the Israelites during the forty years of wandering the desert.

## 13. Passover Seder Plates

The Passover Seder plate holds the symbolic foods eaten during the Passover Seder. The foods on the plate, along with a stack of three matzos and wine, are used during the meal as part of retelling the story of the exodus from Egypt. The traditional foods include maror (bitter herbs, such as horseradish or romaine lettuce), charosset (compote of fruits, nuts, cinnamon, and wine), beitzah (roasted egg), karpas (vegetable, such as parsley or celery, to be dipped in salt water), and zeroah (roasted shankbone).

- A. Spode china dish, “The Service of Passover,” designed by Christopher Boulton, and printed in brown with a gilded gadroon edge. The words of the service, circling the edge of the dish within a garland border, are written in both Hebrew and English. Six roundels at the edge of the center design name the six traditional foods used in the ceremony. “The Star of David is composed of staves with which it is recorded the peoples of Israel were beaten in captivity. These enclose candles and goblets of wine with six dishes used in the Seder ceremony. The tethered kid stands beside the broken column symbolising the release of the children of Israel and breaking away from the domination of Egypt.”<sup>10</sup>



- B. Royal Cauldron china “sederdish” made in England in the 1950s, with color illustrations by Eric Tunstall.

The “Order of Performing the Ceremony” is printed in gold, in Hebrew and English, in a scalloped circle. Surrounding the center, in indentions meant to hold smaller dishes, are scenes representing the six traditional foods: a lamb, horseradish, parsley, sea salt, wine/mushrooms/pomegranates, and an egg. Circling the outer rim of the dish, inside the gilded scalloped edge, are illustrations of the ten plagues, separated by two menorahs and the four questions in Hebrew and English. Printed within a Star of David on the back of the dish are the words Grindley, made in England, Royal Cauldron, “Sederdish,” registration #s in Eng, US, Canada, Illustrations by Eric Tunstall. Vine and leaf patterns are printed between the points of the star.





- C. French transferware seder plate, printed in black. The word matzah in Hebrew is printed in the center over a ground of scrollwork. The order of the service is printed in Hebrew around the rim, interspersed with cartouches of illustrations that are reproductions of scenes from the famous Amsterdam Haggadah of 1712 (see below). The scenes are identified in French. This seems to be quite unusual; most of the listed copies of the piece identify the scenes in English. Those versions of the plate include the identifying phrases with translations written exactly like this: with a strong hand, the wise sons, between the parts, and the Egyptians illtreated us, Rabbi Elazar the son of Azaria, these unleavened cakes why do we eat, and we therefore owe thanks to Him. The name of the maker, Tepper, appears on the back. A centaur holding a flag marked Paris is stamped over the name. The marks M and Y5 are incised into the clay.



- D. Facsimile of the Amsterdam *Haggadah* of 1712. The 1712 edition included all the copperplate illustrations from the Amsterdam *Haggadah* of 1695, as well as two new illustrations. One of the new pages illustrated the sequence of the Passover Seder, and the other illustrated the ten plagues. Most of the illustrations from both editions were copies from a *Haggadah* produced in Venice in 1609.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Stephen S. Kayser, ed., *Jewish Ceremonial Art: a Guide to the Appreciation of the Art Objects Used in Synagogue and Home, Principally from the Collections of the Jewish Museum of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 9.
- <sup>2</sup>Eugene Borowitz & Frances WeinmanSchwartz, *The Jewish Moral Virtues*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1999), 111.
- <sup>3</sup>The Jewish Museum Collections, <http://www.jewishmuseum.org.uk/collections/theme1.asp>, Accessed 8/22/2009.
- <sup>4</sup>Edited from North Shore Synagogue, <http://www.northshoresynagogue.org/RabiWhitman.php>, Accessed 8/22/2009.
- <sup>5</sup>Ida Huberman, *Living Symbols: Symbols in Jewish Art and Tradition*, (Ramat-Gan: Massada, 1988), [114], pl. 24.
- <sup>6</sup>Lion, Jewish Encyclopedia.com, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=436&letter=L&search=lion>, Accessed 9/4/2009.
- <sup>7</sup>Crown of the Law, JewishEncyclopedia.com, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=902&letter=C&search=crown of the law>, Accessed 9/4/2009.
- <sup>8</sup>Huberman, 29.
- <sup>9</sup>Abram Kanof, *Jewish Ceremonial Art and Religious Observance*, (New York: Abrams, 1970, reprinted 1980), 226.
- <sup>10</sup>History of the Spode Passover Plate, <http://www.spode.co.uk/history/Passover%20Plate.htm>, Accessed 8/22/2009.

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