LIVING BY
The Book
THE JEWISH BIBLE
AND THE EVERYDAY
POWER OF TEXT

The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life
University of California, Berkeley

WARREN HELLMAN GALLERY
CHARLES MICHAEL GALLERY
KORET FOUNDATION & TAUBE PHILANTHROPIES LOBBY

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CASE STUDY NUMBER 6
CURATORS’ INTRODUCTION

The Bible stands at the very center of Jewish life, both as text and as a physical object. The Jewish Bible can be seen as a dynamic network of intersecting texts developed over a long period of time, beginning with the Bible itself, and continuing with translations, midrash, and rabbinic commentaries that extend into the present. But the physicality of the Bible is equally central. Its words are written in manuscript scrolls and printed books, housed in synagogues and homes, embellished with decorative objects, encased in treasured chests, and dressed with precious textiles. The text is also visually represented in a multiplicity of formats, through images, symbols, reproductions, and objects that both evoke and interpret it for use in all aspects of life.

This core physical presence of the Bible has offered Jewish life definition and structure, operating in the background to color the experience of time, space, and the self. Biblical texts help navigate the physical world: Jews keep biblical time, cultivate biblical bodies (from circumcision to clothing and food), and build and imagine biblical spaces, in their synagogues, homes, and community centers, and in their attachment to the Holy Land. Even outside of ritual, Jews may lead biblical lives, and experience the everyday power of text in a variety of contexts.

Paradoxically, one can describe the impact of the Bible on Jewish life almost without books themselves, and most certainly without having to “open” a book. This exhibition brings together objects, clothing, furniture, and tourist memorabilia from across The Magnes Collection that interpret the Bible with remarkable diversity and creativity. From the most precious ornaments to the very mundane, these objects showcase the ways text can serve as an archive of possibilities and a powerful platform for shaping everyday life.

--Dr. Francesco Spagnolo, Curator, and Daniel Fisher, PhD Candidate, Near Eastern Studies, and Magnes Graduate Fellow
The Bible as Object: A Survey

Often referred to as “The Book,” the Hebrew Bible takes many forms, ranging from manuscript scrolls and codices to books of varying sizes, to a variety of digital formats. The Bible is also often evoked through visual representation: an open scroll, the Tablets of the Law, the Decalogue, but also crowns (Heb. keter torah, the “crown of the Torah,” after Avot 4:13) and trees ripe with fruit (etz chayyim, the “tree of life,” after Proverbs 3:18). In all of these instances, the Bible is, first and foremost, an object.

1. Wimpel (Torah binder made from circumcision cloth) for a child named Eliezer, called Lasi, bar Levi born on the first of the month of Tammuz [5]600
   Gernsheim, Hesse, Germany, 1840
   Pigment on linen
   Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, Siegfried S. Strauss collection, 67.1.21.2

2. Torah pointer and (decommissioned) spice container
   [Morocco], n.d. (ca. 1920)
   Silver repoussé
   Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Sanford Burstein, 71.21.1

3. Isaac Leeser (1806–1868)
   torah neviim u­khetuvim. The twenty-four books of the Holy Scriptures carefully translated after the best Jewish authorities
   English and Hebrew
   Philadelphia, L. Johnson & Company, 5619 [1858–59]
   Gift of Marion Blumberg, 2009.6

4. Miniature Bible with silver box and photograph of Max Cohen
   Maine, United States, n.d. (ca. 1920)
   Hebrew
   Paper, cloth binding, sterling silver, silver gelatin print
   Gift of the Estate of Roger Levenson, 94.36.1 a–c
   Miniature Bible given by Governor Percival P. Baxter of Maine (1921–1925) to his friend and advisor Max Cohen (d. 1930). A photograph of Cohen is inside the box alongside the Bible.

5. Miniature Torah Ark with curtain and Torah scroll, depicting the Tablets of the Law, a crown, and two flanking lions
   United States, n.d. (ca. 1920)
   Lacquered wood with brass cartouche, cotton velvet curtain with silk embroidery floss (inside: miniature paper Torah)
   Gift of Mrs. Sophie Eisenberg in memory of Morris Eisenberg, 85.17 a–d
The Bible as Object: Torah Scrolls, Repurposed

Scrolls of the Hebrew Bible are made with parchment (animal skin) panels, stitched together with hair or sinew and inscribed with ink. Torah scrolls are extremely valuable objects, made professionally with costly materials, and meant to last for a long time. When left behind in migration processes, seized by hostile religious authorities, or lost in the Holocaust, fragments of these scrolls have been repurposed as bookbindings, tourist memorabilia, and even as painting surfaces.

1. V. Chugayev
   Untitled (Landscape on the back of a Torah scroll fragment)
   1943
   Ink and oil paint on parchment
   2007.0.25

   Landscape painted on the back of a Torah scroll fragment (Genesis 38:26–42:7) written in Hebrew Ashkenazi square script. The origins of this item in The Magnes Collection are unknown. The painter, Chugayev, could not be identified, but his name and the date point to Eastern Europe, probably the Soviet Union, during the Second World War.

   The orientation of the landscape is set against that of the Hebrew text on the scroll. For the purpose of this display, the landscape is thus shown upside down, allowing the Hebrew text to be read correctly.

2. Domenico Pellegrini (Bologna, early 17th century—after 1682)
   Armoniosi concerti sopra la chitarra spagnola
   Bologna, G. Monti, 1650
   Jean Gray Hargrove Music Library, University of California, Berkeley, M127.P36 A7 1650

   Many Jewish books and manuscripts were confiscated by Inquisition authorities in Italy during the 16th century. In Bologna, the Talmud and other Hebrew works were burned on the instructions of Pope Julius III in 1553. Multiple manuscripts and Torah scrolls, made of parchment, were repurposed as bookbindings. The fragments of the original texts are currently being retrieved, inventoried, and re-assembled by scholars. This guitar tablature published in Bologna in 1650, now in the Music Library at UC Berkeley, was bound with a 14th–15th century Torah scroll fragment (Numbers 32:11–34:13) in Hebrew Sephardic square script.

3. Illustrated Haggadot for the Passover Seder

   The Haggadah (“narrative”) is a Jewish text performed at the Passover Seder, a ritual feast that marks the beginning of the Festival of Passover. The Seder (“order”) is one of the core events of Jewish life. In modern times, it is celebrated by families within the Jewish home, or by communities and congregations inside synagogues, community centers, and university campuses, as well as hotels and even cruise ships. The text of the Passover Haggadah combines a narrative of the Exodus from Egypt with blessings, rituals, songs, and Talmudic commentaries. Textually, the Haggadah is an “open narrative”: its contents can be augmented, and new generations and Jewish groups have been adding to it, pursuing both tradition and experimentation. Visually, the Haggadah often presents itself as an illustrated manuscript or book, and the illustrations reflect a wide variety of aesthetic approaches, representational needs, and cultural and political agendas.

   The covers of the printed Haggadot assembled here offer visual ways of performing the story of the Exodus from Egypt, blending it with familiar motifs (ranging from contemporary, local styles to ancient Egyptian imagery) and other, more recent struggles—against Nazi Germany, for religious freedom and freedom of movement in Soviet Russia, and for civil rights in the United States, in the wake of the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. These struggles are often presented and perceived as both particular to the Jewish experience, and shared globally. As Arthur Waskow notes in his introduction to the Freedom Seder Haggadah (1969): “In our world all men face the Pharaohs who could exterminate them any moment, and so enslave them all the time. Passover therefore fuses, for an instant, with the history and the future of all mankind.”

3.1 Mark Podwal, ill. (b. 1945)
   Let My People Go. A Haggadah
   English and Hebrew
   New York, Darien House, Inc., 1972
   Haggadah 43.13
3.2 Arthur I. Waskow (b. 1933) and Lloyd McNeill, ill. 
*The Freedom Seder. A New Haggadah for Passover*
English and Hebrew 
Haggadah 42.8

Hebrew and English 
Munich, Zionist Federation “Unity and Relief” [and Third United States Army], 1946 
Haggadah 39.19

Created by survivors liberated from Dachau and Theresienstadt, this Haggadah was used at a Passover service held in a Munich Displaced Persons Camp for Jewish refugees, American soldiers, and American Joint Distribution Committee members. Reimagining the Passover Seder in terms of the liberation of the Jews from the Nazis, it begins, “We were slaves to Hitler in Germany...” The insignia on the cover is from General Patton’s Third Army.

3.4 Abraham Regelson, transl. (1896–1981), and Nota Koslowsky, ill. 
hagadah shel pesach. *Hagadah of Passover*
Hebrew and English 
New York, Shulsinger Bros. 1944 
Haggadah 37.5

hagadah shel pesach. *The Haggadah of Passover*
Hebrew and English 
New York, Shulsinger Bros. 1949 
Haggada 36.12

3.6 Joseph Panitz, Dorothy Rochmis (1917–2001), and Basha Wanamaker, eds. 
undzer hagodeh farn dritn seder (Our Haggadah for the Third Seder) 
Yiddish and English 
Haggadah 8.14

Presenting Passover as a timeless symbol of the “quest for liberty,” the Yiddish text of this Haggadah (first printed in 1957) connects the biblical story of slavery in Egypt with the resistance movements of the Warsaw Ghetto and the Maccabees.

4. Eugene Abeshaus (USSR and Israel, 1939–2008) 
*Jonah and the Whale in Haifa Port*
Tel Aviv, Israel, Grebel, 1978
Color lithograph
Gift of the artist, 94.26.3

Born in Leningrad, Eugene Abeshaus was censored by the Soviet regime, and became the leader of a Jewish art collective, “Aleph,” active in the mid-1970s. His work, smuggled out of the Soviet Union, was exhibited at the Berkeley Art Museum in 1976, the year in which Abeshaus immigrated to Israel, settling in Ein Hod, an artist colony near Haifa established by Marcel Janco in 1953. *Jonah and the Whale in Haifa Port* blends the biblical narrative of the Book of Jonah with the artist’s contemporary immigrant experience. A container on the port’s dock is identified with the letters ZIM, which refer to Israel’s largest cargo shipping company, founded by the Jewish Agency and the Histadrut in 1945.
5. **Matzah plate inscribed with the word matzah, and the “Four Questions,” depicting scenes from the Passover Seder**
Staffordshire, England, Ridgeways, n.d. (ca. 1925)
Ceramic with Tepper black transfers
Gift of Mary Schussheim, 82.20.5

Plate for holding the matzah, inscribed in Hebrew and English, depicting select episodes from the biblical narrative of the Exodus from Egypt, as well as a scene with the Mishnaic sage mentioned in the Passover Haggadah, Rabbi Ele'azar ben 'Azaryiah (1st–2nd century CE). The visualization of texts combines the Bible with the structure of the Passover Seder, Medieval and Renaissance iconography, and views of the English countryside.

6. **Basin illustrated with the story of Joseph**
Iran (collected in India), ca. 1920
Brass
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, Bernard Kimmel collection, 77.345

Likely created for the early 20th-century tourist market, this basin is engraved with biblical scenes and Hebrew captions depicting the life of Joseph, including his dream, his abandonment, his sale to Potiphar, Potiphar’s wife’s attempt to seduce Joseph, and his triumph at Pharaoh’s court (Genesis 37–46). The panel featuring Joseph and Potiphar’s wife is captioned “The Love of Zuleikha,” referring to Judaeo-Persian poetry based on the Qura'an’s version of the Biblical narrative (22nd Sura).

7. **Ketubbah (marriage contract) illustrated with twelve vignettes depicting biblical scenes**
Revere (Mantua), Italy, July 6, 1827
Ink and pigment on parchment
Gift of Charles Michael, 2012.10.1

The twelve biblical scenes that illustrate this ketubbah include the creation of the world (Genesis 2–3); Noah’s ark (Genesis 6–7); the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22); Jacob’s ladder (Genesis 28); Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39); Moses and Pharaoh’s daughter (Exodus 2); Moses on Mount Horeb (Exodus 7); David and Goliath (1 Samuel: 17); Solomon’s judgment (1 Kings: 3); Samson (Judges 16:29); and Mordecai’s parade with Haman (Esther 6).
6. Calendar for counting the days of the ’omer between Passover and Shavuot
Thessaloniki, Macedonia, Greece, n.d.
Linen, silk embroidery floss over paper applique
Gift of Rebecca Israel Contopoulos, 2012.13.1

The Counting of the ’omer (Heb. sefirat ha-’omer) refers to the practice of reckoning the forty-nine days between Passover and Shavuot, following the instructions given in Leviticus 23:15–16. This large, brightly embroidered fabric was made for and used in a Sephardic synagogue in Thessaloniki.

7. Holiday Greetings

7.1 Mr. and Mrs. Herman Miller

Happy and Prosperous New Year. le-shanah tovah tikatevu ve-tekhatemu
Greeting card
English, Hebrew, and Yiddish
Los Angeles, Calif., United States, 1924
Ink, colored pencil and metallic gold paint on paper
Gift of the Estate of Sarah Grimblat Stern, 85.54.1.2

Handmade New Year’s greeting card depicting an iteration of the Great Seal of the United States, including a bald eagle, a flag, and an olive branch, inscribed with a New Year’s greeting poem in Yiddish.

7.2 le-shanah tovah tikatevu. A happy New Year

Pop-up greeting card
Hebrew and English
Germany, ca. 1910
Offset die-cut lithograph and colored tissue paper
86.0.7

Greeting card depicting Moses holding the Tablets of the Law and a man sounding the shofar horn, set against a background combining a synagogue setting and floral motifs.

7.3 Survey Department of the State of Israel

shnat shtayim la-medinat yisrael. Second Year of the State of Israel. 5710
Map with New Year’s greeting note
English and Hebrew
Tel Aviv, Y. Shpira, 1949
Offset lithograph and ink on mulberry paper
LIB 91.13.1

New Year’s celebratory map inscribed in Hebrew with a New Year’s greeting note from the Borschon family.

8. Rejoice in the Law. A Happy New Year. sisu-ve-gilu be-simchat torah

New Year’s broadside celebrating the Spanish-American War
English, Hebrew and Yiddish
New York, J. Katzenelenbogen, 1898
2000.0.13

New Year’s and Simchat Torah broadside celebrating the US victory in the Battle of Santiago de Cuba (July 3, 1898) during the Spanish-American War. Includes depictions of the flags of the United States and Cuba, as well as photographic reproductions of Admirals George Dewey (1837–1917) and William T. Sampson (1840–1902) and of the USS Maine, with captions in Yiddish.
Biblical Bodies

From ritual circumcision to the daily activities of dressing, bathing, eating, and praying, Jewish bodies are shaped by a range of practices derived from the Bible. Dress codes are often guided by biblical law, both in terms of the fabrics that are permitted, and of the types of garments worn during prayer and in everyday life. Certain ritual garments exist solely to perform biblical commandments. Prayer shawls, for example, are a support to the ritual fringes (Heb. tzitzit) prescribed in Numbers 15 and Deuteronomy 22, while phylacteries (Heb. tefilin) are leather boxes with straps that both contain portions of manuscript biblical texts, and allow those who perform the commandment to wear these texts on their arms and foreheads (Exodus 13; Deuteronomy 6 and 11). The practice of circumcision even marks the flesh of infant males as the sign of covenant (Genesis 17). Immersion in the miqveh (ritual bath) ritually cleanses male and female bathers, before major life cycle events, and after activities or periods that the Book of Leviticus and subsequent interpretations mark as unclean, such as menstruation and childbirth. Kosher food, the very food that forms and sustains Jewish physical bodies, conforms to rabbinic interpretations of what is appropriate to eat. On these and other levels, Jewish bodies are biblical, formed in relation to the ancient writings.

1. Prayer shawl with shpanyer arbet [metallic thread] neckpiece
   Eastern Europe, ca. 1900
   Wool with fine metallic silver ribbon
   Gift of Mrs. Hilda Cohen in memory of Alfred Cohen, 83.24.2

2. Eileen Amiel Baroukk
   Towel for the ritual bath (miqveh) with handsewn embroidered band depicting floral and arboreal motifs
   Palestine, ca. 1910
   Cotton with fine metallic ribbon
   Gift of Esther Bemoras, 94.44.5

3. Circumcision knife and case
   Königsberg, Germany, G. Grünewald, 19th century
   Metal, ivory or bone, leather, velvet
   Gift of Rabbi William Z. Dalin, 75.331 a–b

4. Phylacteries (tefilin) inscribed in Hebrew yad ("arm" or "hand") and rosh ("bead")
   Leather, cardboard, ink and parchment
   Gift of Anna Marie Levy, 93.11.2 a–b and 93.11.3 a–b

5. Phylacteries (tefilin) cases with engraved floral and arboreal motifs
   Eastern Europe, 18th century
   Silver
   Peachy and Mark Levy Family Judaica Collection, 2015.6.75

6. Belt for Yom Kippur, with engraved buckle with text from Leviticus 16:30 surmounted by a crown and surrounded by a wreath and two flanking lions
   Galicia, 18th century
   Silver with linen support
   Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, Siegfried S. Strauss collection, 67.1.16.6

7. Leah W. Leonard (ca. 1885–?)
   Jewish cookery, in accordance with the Jewish dietary laws
   MCBC 29

8. Ottoman bathing clogs
   Egypt, ca. 1900
   Wood, mother of pearl inlay, and leather
   Gift of Estelle & Daniel Milber (Mizrahi), 96.22.5 a–b

   In the Eastern Mediterranean, Jewish brides would wear elaborately decorated wooden clogs to their prenuptial ritual immersions at the miqveh (ritual bath), cleansing themselves in accordance with biblical and rabbinic legislation. Clogs were often passed down from one generation to the next as family heirlooms.
Biblical Spaces—Here and There

Settling around the world, Jews maintain dynamic connections with the lands of the Bible. Scriptural landscapes, scenes, and characters figure prominently in the work of Jewish artists—even as their particular features have changed with the times. The Holy Land has been variously represented as an agricultural haven, a romantic, oriental space frozen in time since King David, and as the meeting place for all Abrahamic religions. Pilgrims and tourists have travelled to its holy sites, returning with souvenirs that bring those spaces home. The complex politics of Zionism include an attempt to inhabit the territories of the Bible. Cultural trends in the State of Israel range from a national passion for archeological discovery to the inclusion of ancient themes in the quotidian. Jewish homes are also biblical spaces, marked at the doorposts by mezuzot containing manuscripts of biblical texts, and populated with a variety of biblical objects, including Sabbath candlesticks, books, records, toys, and the other assorted items of Jewish life and ritual. As texts like the Talmud fill Jewish bookshelves, they and other works of rabbinic interpretation help cultivate an intellectual space centered upon the Bible. On all these levels, Jews cultivate biblical spaces from the home to the Holy Land.

1. Olive wood photo book with scenes of Jerusalem, Hebrew writing on the front, and a cross on the back
   Jerusalem, Israel, n.d.
   Olive wood, paper, photographs
   65.388b

   English, Hebrew, and French
   Jerusalem, Isac Chagise
   Pressed flowers, paper, buffering paper, carved olive wood and cloth binding
   83.63.2

ETHNOGRAPHIC DOLLS FROM ISRAEL

Capitalizing on increased tourism in the 1920s, independent artisans began crafting ethnographic dolls modeled after people on the streets of Palestine. After the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, these dolls came to play important roles in nation-building. Dolls from this period represent two idealized national types: the “New” and the “Old” Jew. The New Jewish type is represented by dolls depicting chalutzim (pioneers) of European heritage, coming to Israel to build the homeland. Among the types of doll that model the Old Jewish type, Hassidic Jews are shown engaging with the Torah, while Yemenite Jews are represented as if they stepped out of the pages of Bible, frozen in timeless antiquity. Claiming both types as contributors to Israeli culture, artisans rooted their newly-formed state in the ancient traditions of the Bible.

Several of the dolls in The Magnes Collection were made by Hameshakem, an Israeli non-profit organization founded in 1962, boasting many workshops around the country that employ the elderly and those with disabilities with the goal of occupational rehabilitation. During its early years, Hameshakem was a major producer of ethnographic national costume dolls for the tourist market. Though the creation and sale of ethnographic dolls decreased throughout Israel in the 1980s, Hameshakem continues to produce and sell handmade crafts today.

3. Ethnographic doll. Hassidic man with Torah scroll
   Israel, Hameshakem, n.d. (ca. 1960s)
   Clay head, wire body wrapped in string, cloth, on wooden base
   1991.0.12.5

4. Ethnographic doll. Hassidic woman with Shabbat candles
   Israel, Hameshakem, n.d. (ca. 1960s)
   Clay head, wire body wrapped in string, leather hands and feet, cloth, on wooden base
   1991.0.12.3
7. Hans Teppich (Germany, Palestine, and Israel, 1904–1983)
   Biblical figurines
   Israel, n.d. (ca. 1955)
   Turned Bronze, hand-etched
   Gift of the Estate of Caroline Anspacher, 79.61.1

7.1 Moses
   79.61.1.12

7.2 Aaron
   79.61.1.17

7.3 Abasverus
   79.61.1.8

7.4 Joseph
   79.61.1.20

7.5 Abraham
   79.61.1.18

7.6 Sarah
   79.61.1.19

7.7 Tamar
   79.61.1.21

7.8 David
   79.61.1.24

8. Ethnographic doll. Yemenite man with sidelocks selling oranges
   Israel, [Aly], n.d. (ca. 1950)
   Cloth, wire body wrapped in string
   1991.0.12.8

9. David and Goliath and “Daniel” performed with full cast and orchestra
   Brooklyn, NY, Cricket Records, 1953
   Phonograph record, 78 rpm

10. “Biblical Period” oil lamp
    Palestine, ca. 1800–1500 BCE
    Terra cotta
    Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, Michael Rapinsky collection, ARC 31/72.48.2.1

11. Imitation “Coin of the Return,” purporting to be from the period of Persian rule in Judea (4th century BCE)
    n.d. [20th century]
    Silver and copper
    Gift of Victor Ries, 70.38

12. Coins of the Bible: Era of 1st and 2nd Jewish Revolt (authentic reproduction)
    Israel, n.d. [20th century]
    Pewter
    67–100

BIBLICAL HOMES: DOORPOSTS

From their doorways and inwards, throughout their rooms and halls, Jewish homes are marked with the Bible. The posting of a mezuzah (“doorpost”), a parchment scroll containing portions of Deuteronomy 6 and 11 written in twenty-two lines and often encased in a box or container, either affixed on a building or encased in a niche, follows the commandment in Deuteronomy 6:9 and 11:20: “and thou shalt write [these words] upon the doorposts [mezuzot] of thy house and upon thy gates.”

13. Mezuzah case, engraved to depict the “Tomb of Absalom” (after 2 Samuel 18)
    Palestine, n.d. (ca. 1894–1899)
    Wood, ink, and ink on vellum
    Gift of Ingrid Weinberg, 94.14

14. Cover for mezuzah niche, inscribed for a woman named Rinah Malqah
    Morocco, ca. 1920
    Silk, velvet, silver metallic thread, and board
    Gift of Ruth Eis, 75.183.362

    Israel, 1974
    Silver, ink on vellum
    Gift of Molly Grossman, 2008.23.1 a–d

Alice Grossman served in the U.S. Women’s Armed Forces during World War II, and later worked as a secretary with the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C., for 30 years. Yitzhak Rabin (1922–1995) served as Israel’s ambassador to the United States 1968–1973, and became Prime Minister in 1974, the year in which Alice Grossman received the gift of a mezuzah from his wife, Leah. In the 1970s, Alice and her sisters Dora and Molly moved to San Francisco, where sister Anna was already living. The Grossman sisters were active members of the Balboa Group of the San Francisco Chapter of Hadassah and Congregation Ner Tamid.
BIBLICAL HOMES: BOOKS AND BOOKSHELVES

The Hebrew Bible lives in Jewish communities through its interpretive traditions, outlined in rabbinic writings like the Talmud. These and other works of biblical commentary develop and help fill gaps in the text, expanding on what it means to lead a biblical life in post-biblical times. Scriptural writings command that their laws be taught to children (Deuteronomy 6:7). The presence of the Bible and Talmud in Jewish homes, where these volumes are often stored on dedicated bookshelves, allows for the creation of a biblical intellectual space that complements the physical one.

16. Babylonian Talmud. Tractate Nedarim
   Hebrew and Aramaic
   Venice, Italy, Daniel Bomberg, n.d. (between 1520–1548)
   Gift of the Jewish Community of Kochi, Kerala (India), RB 9.6

A first or second edition of the Talmud printed by Daniel Bomberg in Venice, Italy and rebound in Kochi, Kerala (India), where it was collected by The Magnes in 1967.

WARREN HELLMAN GALLERY / DRAWER ONE

Biblical Figures: Persia

Biblical figures represented in different environments often both reflect and refract their shifting stylistic and intertextual contexts. Illustrated Jewish manuscripts from Iran represent the stories of the Pentateuch in classical Persian style, incorporating developments from a range of traditions. Standing before Pharaoh with Aaron, Moses is depicted with his face shining with two horn-like beams of light, after the Western idea that Moses acquired horns (Heb. qaran) in his encounter with God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34). Joseph is depicted interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams according to the canons introduced by Yūsuf va Zulaykha (“Joseph and Zulaykha”), a 14th-century Judeo-Persian epic based on biblical, Qur’anic, midrashic, and Muslim sources.

1. Illustrated Judeo-Persian Manuscript depicting Moses and Aaron standing before Pharaoh (after Exodus 7:8–10)
   Isfahan, Iran, 19th–20th century
   Ink and gouache on paper
   Gift of Chimon Mayeri and family, 85.46.1

2. Illustrated Judeo-Persian Manuscript depicting Joseph interpreting Pharaoh’s dream (after Genesis 41)
   Isfahan, Iran, 19th–20th century
   Ink and gouache on paper
   Gift of Chimon Mayeri and family, 85.46.2

WARREN HELLMAN GALLERY / DRAWER TWO

Biblical Figures: Germany

Mizrach featuring Moses and Aaron
Southern Germany, 18th century
Gouache on paper
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, Siegfried S. Strauss collection, 67.1.6.23

A mizrach, named after the Hebrew word for “east,” is a devotional plaque that designates the direction to be faced during prayer. The Hebrew word also contains the acronym mi-tzad zeb ruach chayim (“from this side [comes] the spirit of life”), further emphasizing the spiritual significance of space and orientation of a practice that has biblical roots (see I Kings 8 and II Chronicles 6). Placed on the walls of homes and synagogues, the plaques are often inscribed with scriptural passages, amuletic and kabbalistic texts, or depictions of holy places. This manuscript portrays Moses (on the right), holding his staff and the tablets with the Ten Commandments, and Aaron, dressed in his priestly robes holding an incense censer, according to scriptural descriptions and their interpretations. The upper Hebrew inscription reads: “He who opens every day the doors of the gates of the East,” a reference to the poem ba-kol yadun, recited in the Yotzer blessing, or blessing of creation, of the Sabbath morning prayers in the Ashkenazi liturgy.
Biblical Postcards

Unlike letters, postcards do not just convey messages from their senders, but also share the experiences and places with which they are associated. Postcards with Jewish themes refer to history, values, and rituals, as well as to biblical lands and holy sites. The present selection includes a variety of representations of how Jews “live by The Book,” by depicting the Land of Israel through highly orientalized and cropped images that render the scenes (and the “Holy Land”) timeless; the reading and teaching of Torah, harkening back to both a nostalgia for and a reinforcement of traditional religious practices; and an array of Jewish rituals that highlight the cycle of Jewish life—from circumcision and marriage to the Jewish holidays in between.

1. Pageant of the purim festival at Tel Aviv. ha-tahalukhah be-chagigat purim be-tel aviv
   Hebrew and English
   Krakow, Poland, K. Hefner & J. Berger, n.d.
   Offset lithograph on paper
   Gift of Alex Stone, 84.24.2.15

   French, English, and German
   [Palestine], Union Postale Universelle, n.d.
   Offset lithograph on paper
   Gift of Dr. Leon Meier, 65.3917.1

3. B'rith-Milah (Beschneidung)
   Postcard reproduction of an engraving by Bernard Picart (18th century)
   German
   Berlin, Germany, Joseph Spiro, n.d.
   Offset lithograph on paper
   Gift of Serge Klein, 98.28.12

   French, English, and German
   [Palestine], Union Postale Universelle, n.d. (dated 1913)
   Offset lithograph on paper
   Gift of Jacqueline and David Berg, 88.26.5.15

5. Meir Gur Arie (b. Meir Gorodtski, Belarus, Palestine, and Israel, 1891–1951)
   Silhouettes: II. Tora Scribe. sofer stam
   English and Hebrew
   Jerusalem, Israel, Bezalel, ca. 1920
   Offset lithograph on paper
   Gift of Mrs. Mary Schussheim, 85.35.20b

A Biblical Amulet

Shiviti amulet
Morocco, 19th century
Ink, pigments, and lacquer on parchment
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 89.0.3

A shiviti is a devotional plaque consisting of Hebrew texts centered on Psalm 16:8 — “I have set [Heb. shiviti] God always before me.” As is typical, this shiviti includes in the center at the top a tetragrammaton—the four Hebrew letters yud, he, vav, he, indicating the name of God. Below this, inscribed in the shape of seven-branched candelabra, are the complete texts of three psalms, including Psalm 67, which calls for God’s blessing and sings of the people’s thanks. The scriptural and graphic structure of the shiviti is often combined with amuletic texts. In this case the texts in the lower section refer to the demon Lilith and the three angels countering her attempts to cause harm to newborns. The outer frame contains additional names of protective angels.
The Bible’s central place in Jewish life begins with its physical presence in the synagogue. Recited from manuscript scrolls in weekly portions over the course of the Jewish year, the biblical text provides structure and continuity to the ritual calendar, as well as a high point during religious services. Since ancient times, chanting the Torah has represented a key part of Jewish study and worship. Manuscript Torah scrolls are housed in special cupboards or niches in synagogues, known in Sephardic communities as the hechal (“temple” or “nave”), and in Ashkenazi communities as the aron (“chest” or “ark”). Both names harken back to the First Temple in Jerusalem, which was often referred to as the bechel, and which held the Ark of the Covenant, the ritual chest that housed the Tablets of the Ten Commandments. The form and materials of the Ark are also evoked in the tik (“case”), used by many Jewish communities from the Middle East, North Africa, and Greece to permanently house a Torah scroll. The Ark of the Covenant was kept behind a curtain (Heb. parochet) in the Temple’s innermost chamber—a tradition continued in the synagogue. The area in front was illuminated by a perpetually lit menorah (“lamp”), recalled in the synagogue by the ner tamid (“eternal light”) that hangs in front of the curtain. The synagogue stands in for the lost temple in these and other ways, offering, as the Talmud suggests of one particular synagogue in Babylon, “a little sanctuary” (TB Megillah 29a, after Ezekiel 11:16).

Wherever Jewish communities take root, initiating religious services, their need for a Torah scroll and Ark precedes that for a synagogue building. Torah scrolls are extremely valuable items, not only because their constituent parts are dear. They are the products of many hours of work, each letter meticulously copied by hand by a professional scribe in a lengthy and laborious process. Whatever the cost, the acquisition of a scroll also requires additional investments: textiles or cases to protect it and identify it; crowns, finials and other decorative elements to adorn it; pointers to read its text; and finally the building of an Ark and the sewing of a curtain to both house and celebrate it in a symbolic relationship to the lost Temple of Jerusalem. The Torah scroll and the Ark cut across time, connecting the biblical past with the present in places of worship across the Jewish world.

1. Cecil Jacob Epril (1897–1982)
   Torah Ark from the RMS Queen Mary
   [Clydebank, Scotland], UK, 1930–1934 (dedicated in 1936)
   Wood, wrought iron, paint, and textile
   Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 92.24
   In the 1930s German Jews seeking to flee Hitler’s genocidal policies were banned from using Norddeutscher Lloyd, the main German shipping line. The British Jewish community appealed to the Cunard-White Star Line to assist the Jews by accepting them as passengers. The company, which was in the middle of building an ocean liner furnished in Art Deco style, the Queen Mary, agreed to include in it a synagogue as well as a kosher kitchen. The RMS Queen Mary navigated the North Atlantic seas from 1936 to 1967, taking with it scores of travellers and immigrants between Europe and New York City. Decommissioned in 1967, it was acquired by the City of Long Beach in California and converted into a hotel and museum. The synagogue disappeared, becoming a storage room, but a local Reform congregation acquired two of its Torah scrolls and several benches. A number of small Southern California congregations used its Torah Ark, also designed in Art Deco style, until The Magnes obtained it and restored it in 1992.

2. Louis M. Morrison (b. 1885)
   Portable Torah Ark
   Rock Springs, WY, United States, ca. 1910
   Sheet metal, wood, cloth, glass, electrical wiring
   Gift of Mr. Melvin J. and Mrs. Marilyn A. Weiss, 2013.5.1
   This Torah Ark served a community of 18 families without an established synagogue in Rock Springs, Wyoming, during the early 1900s. The Ark was kept in the home of the Weiss family, along with an assortment of Torah curtains and its built-in electric ner tamid (eternal light).

3. Torah scroll case, with crown, finials, and Torah scroll, inscribed in Hebrew in memory of Miryam bat Havuv, deceased on 28 Tammuz 5590 [Tuesday, July 6, 1830]
   Kolkata, West Bengal, India, inscribed in 1830
   Wood, leather brocade, and metal
   Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, Kimmel collection, 69.71
   This cylindrical case collected in India marks the influence of Middle Eastern and especially of Iraqi Jewish immigrants’ customs on the subcontinent. Made from wood, the case is overlaid with green damask and six repoussé silver bands decorated with a floral pattern. When closed, the two
detachable upper pieces, made of wood covered with gold-washed silver, form an onion-shaped dome. On one side, the inscription pairs a passage from Genesis 49:18—"I wait for your deliverance, O Lord"—with words from Leviticus 26:46 that refer to the scroll inside: “This is the teaching that Moses set before the Israelites. These are the decrees, laws, and rules that the Lord established between himself and the children of Israel.” On the other side is a dedication to a woman named Miryam, daughter of Havuv, “may her soul be bound up in the bonds of life in the Garden of Eden.” Another inscription inside the Torah scroll case indicates that she died on Tuesday, July 6, 1830. The Torah scroll case was acquired from the Magen David Synagogue in Kolkata, which was built in 1884 by Elias David Joseph Ezra to honor his father. Both were influential real estate entrepreneurs. Mozelle Ezra, the mother of E. D. J. Ezra, was known for her philanthropy and for establishing the Ezra Hospital in her husband’s memory.

4. Naftali Herz (mid-18th century–early 19th century)
Template of contract for the sale of a Torah Scroll from Sefer Nabalat Shivah
Hebrew, Aramaic, and Judeo-German
Germany, late 18th Century
Manuscript
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, Siegfried S. Strauss collection, 67.1.7.10

5. Torah Ark curtain (Heb. parokhet) embroidered with depictions of a Torah Ark and synagogue hanging lamps
Safed, Palestine, 1850–1900
Wool felt and metallic embroidery
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 86.5

6. Hanging oil synagogue lamp
Kerala, India, 1920–1960
Metal and glass
Gift of Mrs. Bernard Kimmel, 2008.26.1

Undressing the Torah

Before the Torah can be read in synagogue, the scroll must be removed from the Ark and from the textile and metal ornaments with which it is covered—in a sense, the Torah is “undressed.” Even with their mantles, crowns, finials, shields, and pointers shed, manuscript scrolls remain elaborately, if subtly decorated. Staves, endpieces, and handles are often carved, inlaid, and inscribed. The manuscript itself is also a carefully wrought work or art, its text arranged in justified columns and its lettering meticulously decorated with serifs.

7. David Gumbel (Germany, Palestine, and Israel, 1906–1992)
Ornaments for the Torah scroll
Israel, n.d. (ca. 1980)
Gift of the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Tourism of the State of Israel

7.1 Torah finials and crown
Silver
80.0.2.1.2

7.2 Torah shield inscribed in Hebrew, va-yitenu lekha keter melukhah (“they shall give you the crown of sovereignty”, after a poem included in the liturgy for the Musaf Service of the High Holy Days)
Silver and semiprecious stone
80.0.2.1.1

7.3 Torah Pointer
Silver and semiprecious stone
80.0.2.1.3

8. Leopold Mandl, silversmith
Torah crown in the shape of two regal crowns, decorated with floral motifs, with six bells
Vienna, Austria, between 1899–1922
Silver, parcel gilt
Peachy and Mark Levy Family Judaica Collection, 2015.6.80
9. O. Fini, silversmith

Torah finials with architectural and floral motifs, depictions of Jewish ritual objects used in the Temple of Jerusalem, movable elements, and seven bells

Livorno, Italy (collected in Tunisia), 1837
Silver and brass
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase through the Benjamin Goor Acquisition Fund, 77.333 b

The decorations in the lower tier of these finials include depictions of ritual objects used in the Temple of Jerusalem: hands spread in the priestly blessing position; the Ark of the Covenant with cherubs and the Hebrew word, shaday; the Tablets of the Law with the Decalogue; a hanging lamp (ner tamid); a burning flame; a priestly vestment inscribed with the Hebrew word, me’il; a decorative shield; and a seven-branched candelabrum (menorah).

10. Torah shield depicting a band delivering the Tablets of the Law from the heavenly clouds, Moses and Aaron, a crown, columns and floral motifs, and with a compartment to insert a label to identify a Torah scroll

Ukraine/Germany, 18th century
Silver, gilt mount
Peachy and Mark Levy Family Judaica Collection, 2015.6.50

11. Ornaments for Torah scrolls used on Purim

Mumbai, Maharashtra, India, ca. 1930
Cellulose, tin, and paper
Gift of Mrs. Mary Schussheim, 85.35.11

Covering the Torah

A Torah mantle, referred to in Hebrew as mapah, beged (“garment”) or me’il (“vestment,” specifically worn by the Priests, or kohanim), is an item of “clothing” specifically designed for Torah scrolls. Often created to fit the size of a specific scroll, it envelops it while the manuscript is stored in the Ark, and during synagogue processions. Torah mantles, first attested to in the Sarajevo Haggadah (Spain, 14th century), are made of a wide variety materials, and may be embroidered or otherwise decorated to highlight the name of a donor, of a family, or of a deceased person to whose memory the textile is dedicated. These ritual textiles have been traditionally made by women serving as their contribution to synagogue life. They are often inscribed with women’s names, but used and displayed in the section of a synagogue traditionally populated only by male congregants. Inscriptions often include the Hebrew words, keter torah, meaning “the crown of the Torah” (after the Mishnah, Avot 4:13). Maimonides (12th century) connected this expression with a passage from Proverbs (8:15–16) that indicates how royalty, nobility, as well as legislative and judicial powers, all derive their authority from the Bible. Among the numerous mantles in The Magnes Collection, several were donated by Jewish congregations in the San Francisco Bay Area.
17.1 Torah mantle embroidered with shpanyer arbet
Eastern Europe, 18th century
Silk and metallic thread
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, Siegfried S. Strauss collection, 75.183.56 (67.1.14.2)

17.2 Torah mantle depicting a six-pointed star and the Hebrew acronym k[eter]"t[orah] ("crown of Torah")
United States, ca. 1930
Cotton-velvet and silk embroidery floss
75.183.65

17.3 Torah mantle made with repurposed cloth, a red ribbon, and five bells
Yemen, 20th century
Cotton, linen, silk, and silver
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase with funds from the Goor Fund, 80.2.9

17.4 Torah mantle depicting the Tablets of the Law surmounted by a crown and flanked by two rampant lions, and inscribed in Hebrew with the Ten Commandments and the words, keter torah ("crown of Torah")
United States, ca. 1930
Cotton-velvet, silk embroidery floss, metallic thread, and paste jewels
Gift of Congregation Sherith Israel, San Francisco, 75.183.96

17.5 Torah mantle depicting a six-pointed star and the Hebrew acronym k[eter]"t[orah] ("crown of Torah") and the words chanukah [5]695 (December 1934)
United States, 20th century
Cotton-velvet and silk embroidery floss
Gift of Congregation Sherith Israel, San Francisco, 75.183.101

17.6 Torah mantle depicting the Tablets of the Law surmounted by a crown and flanked by two rampant lions, and inscribed in Hebrew with the Ten Commandments and the words, keter torah ("crown of Torah"), and in English "Presented by Sisterhood of Temple Sherith Israel in memory of Daisy Liederman. August 23, 1938 - 26 Ab 5698"
San Francisco, Calif., United States, 20th century
Silk, metallic thread, and silk embroidery floss
Gift of Congregation Sherith Israel, San Francisco, WJHC 1968.006.8

17.7 Torah mantle depicting a six-pointed star surmounted by a crown, floral motifs, and inscribed in Hebrew with the words, keter torah ("crown of Torah")
United States, 20th century
Cotton-velvet, metallic thread, and silk embroidery floss
Gift of Congregation Sherith Israel, San Francisco, 75.183.86

17.8 Torah mantle embroidered with floral motifs
Morocco, ca. 1880
Silk-velvet, silver metallic thread over card, and metallic fringe
Gift of the Bengualid Family, 75.183.97

17.9 Torah mantle depicting a crown and floral motifs, inscribed in Hebrew with the acronym k[eter]"t[orah] ("crown of Torah") and with a Hebrew and Yiddish dedication to Abram Jonas (1855–1923), President of the First Hebrew Congregation of Oakland (Temple Sinai)
Oakland, Calif., United States, inscribed in 1908–1909
Silk-velvet and metallic thread over card
75.183.72

17.10 Torah mantle depicting the Tablets of the Law surmounted by a crown and flanked by two rampant lions, columns and floral motifs, inscribed in Hebrew with the acronym k[eter]"t[orah] ("crown of Torah"), and in German indicating it was a gift from Albert Müller
Dortmund, Germany, ca. 1900
Silk, metallic thread, and silk embroidery floss
75.183.35

17.11 Torah mantle
Fez, Morocco, 20th century
Cotton-velvet, silk embroidery floss, and cotton fringe
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, Zaleznik collection, with funds provided by Dr. Elliot Zaleznik, 78.4.72
A vivid example of “visual Torah,” this synagogue window, which was salvaged from an unknown synagogue and found in an antique shop, contains references to a variety of biblical texts. The stained glass at center depicts the Tablets of the Law, inscribed in Hebrew with the Ten Commandments (after Exodus 20:1-17), within a six-pointed star atop a twelve-branched tree. The tree is a likely reference to the Torah as a “tree of life” (Heb. ’etz chayim, after Proverbs, 3:18). In the surrounding areas, the Twelve Tribes of Israel are indicated by their Hebrew names, and described with images based on the blessings given by Jacob to his twelve sons (after Genesis 49). Each corner portrays a lit seven-branched candelabrum (Heb. menorah, described in Exodus 25 and 37). Following its gift to the Judah L. Magnes Museum in 1975, the window was permanently installed in the museum’s home on Russell Street, in the Elmwood district of Berkeley, where it remained on display until 2010. In 2015, the window was again placed on permanent display at The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life in downtown Berkeley.