IN SEARCH OF HISTORY AT THE JEWISH MUSEUM OF VIENNA

The history of a Galician Torah crown

by Carolin Kayali

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Photo credit: Torah crown, between 1772 and 1799. Jüdisches Museum Wien, Free access - no reuse

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Each of the objects on display at the Jewish Museum of Vienna was once a part of the daily lives or rituals of Jewish families and communities. Bound up with the fates of the Jewish people, together these objects that were each torn from their original context provide a memorial to the Jews who were displaced and murdered, and for this reason the story behind every object deserves to be told. Although only scant reliable information is available for most of the objects, this article describes an attempt to trace the story of a Torah crown from the JMV using just a few clues.

The permanent exhibition in the Jewish Museum Vienna makes it abundantly clear just how many Jewish cult objects (Judaica) were violently torn from their original contexts in synagogues, communities or families. Some bear traces of a violent past and therefore document the destruction of Jewish life. Alongside daily objects, fabrics and precious objects made from gold and silver, several crowns of different sizes and designs are displayed in the glass cases . In Jewish ritual usage, these crowns are not worn by a person but by the law, in the form of the Torah scroll – the most sacred object of any Jewish community. This custom goes back to a quotation from Pirkei Avot, the "Chapters of Our Fathers":

> *"Rabbi Simon said: There are three crowns – the crown of the Torah, the crown of the priesthood, and the crown of kingship, but the 'crown of a good name' surpasses them all."*
>
> ***Pirkei Avot 4,17***

Showcases of the Schaudepot in the Jewish Museum Vienna. Jüdisches Museum Wien,
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Each of the crowns on display in a Jewish museum was therefore once a precious object that was placed with the greatest care over the wooden rollers attached to a Torah scroll. Thus, each of these valuable crowns has its own story that can be researched and recounted. However, very little information is available about the crown listed under inventory number 1052 at the Jewish Museum Vienna. Until now it has been dated to 1650/1700, place of origin, Lemberg. It is also assumed that after 1826 it was used in the Stadttempel, the main synagogue in Vienna.[1]

If no other information is available, then it is worth making a closer inspection of the object itself: stamps that were beaten into the metal when the object was created or taxed, stylistic features or symbols, and details of the manufacturing method can provide insights into where and when it was created.

Information relevant to the object

The crown, made from fire-gilded silver, has a three-part construction: the lower hoop, with a diameter of 11 cm, is decorated with a floral ornament and two double-eagles. Six brackets, also decorated with blossoms and leaves, curve upwards from the lower hoop and carry the higher, smaller hoop, which is again reminiscent of a small crown. Six small, golden lions are mounted on this, and between them they hold a six-petaled flower from which a rosebud

emerges. With a height of only 23.5cm, this crown is quite small compared to other Torah crowns. The size of the crowns is highly variable and also depends on the size of the Torah scroll and the wooden rollers that hold it.[2] The external appearance of the crown already reveals something of its origins, since Torah crowns (Hebr.: *Keterim*) display differences in design depending on where they were made; design traditions develop in parallel with the local traditions of the place of origin or commission.

Torah crown, detail of upper headband/attachment. Carolin Kayali, Free access - no reuse

East-European crowns are usually recognizable by virtue of their two- or three-tier construction using curved brackets and a richly decorated centre piece. Recurring motifs are lions, eagles or other birds and deer as well as bells, buds and blossoms.[3] One feature that is found exclusively in Eastern European, for example, Polish, Belarusian, Russian or Ukrainian Torah crowns, is the use of fully sculpted animals that support a whole section of the crown structure. Animals are also used in Western examples, however, there they tend to be incorporated into the overall design as decorative elements, whereas the animals in Eastern European specimens form an integral and supporting component of the whole architectural arrangement.[4] The Torah crown in the Jewish Museum Vienna, with its six sculptural lions carrying the upper section of the crown, displays this peculiarity, and this places the provenance of the crown firmly within an Eastern European Jewish community.

On yet closer inspection a total of five hallmarks

hallmarks

Hallmarking refers to stamped or engraved marks that indicate, for example, the fineness of silver or gold jewellery. If another stamp is added to a hallmark, it is called a repunch.

are discernible: these were clearly applied at different times, and so make it possible to trace different stages of the object's history.

The chronologically youngest stamp – the number 23 on the lower edge of the inner surface – was most likely added by the Jewish Community of Vienna towards the end of the 20th century and is part of a numbering system used to categorize objects that were used either in the Vienna Stadttempel or in the Leopoldstadt temple.[5]

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> Torah crown, detail stamp with the numbers 23, probably from the Israeli religious community.

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> Detail of tax stamp 12D. 12 stands for the tax paid and D for the Lemberg Filial Punishment Office.

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> Torah crown, detail of chased lines on the inside.

A duty stamp composed of the number 12 and the letter D, that was applied directly underneath the left foot of one of the double eagles, dates back to 1806/07 and is a “large hallmark for silver from the Royal and Imperial Hallmarking Branch Office [sic!] Lemberg”, for objects to which an earlier hallmark had already been applied.[6] The letter D stands for Lemberg.[7] The stamp confirms that the appropriate tax has been received.[8] Chiseled strokes

can be made out on the inner surface of the headband which suggest that a quality test was carried out, involving the removal of a few shavings of the metal to be tested for silver content.

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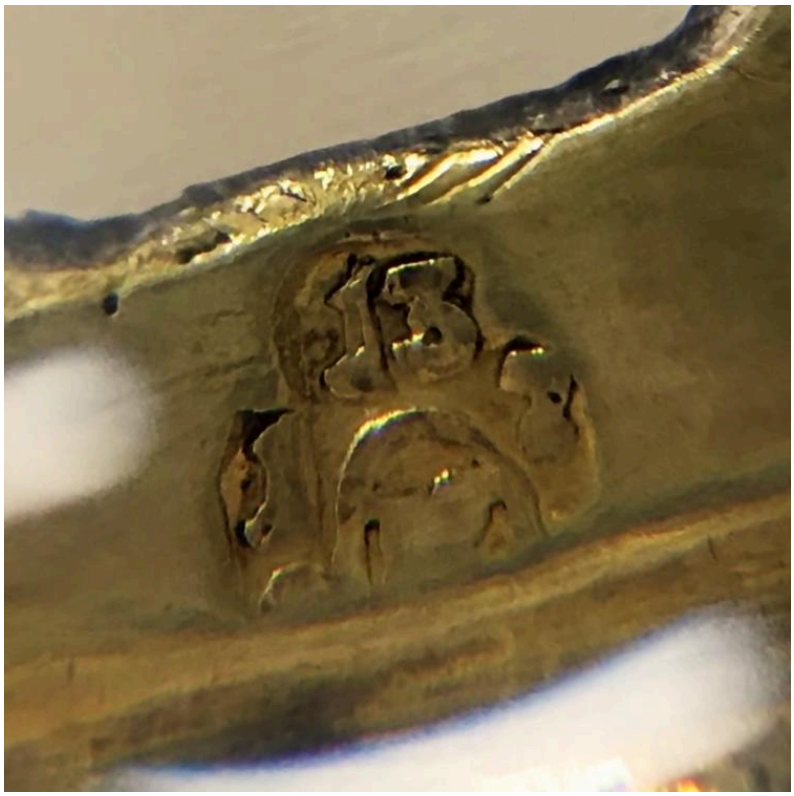
> Torah crown, detail. Hallmarking of the year and fineness.



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Torah crown, detail. Hallmarking of the year and fineness - enlarged.

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> Torah crown, detail. Hallmarking of the year and fineness.

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> Torah crown. Detail of the hallmarking of the year and the fineness - enlarged.

There are two further old hallmarks on the upper edge of the headband. They indicate a silver content of 13/16 and resemble each other closely. The figures indicating the year are not evenly applied and accordingly the numbers are hard to make out. However, a comparison with other hallmarks of this type enables the identification of the upper numbers as a 1 and a

7 respectively. A law enacted in 1786/87 introduced the hallmarking business (in the capital city of Lemberg as well as in other places), so that silver and gold content could be harmonized and determined in line with other Habsburg hereditary lands.[9] According to the law, the hallmark must "contain a letter in its center, indicate the fine content [sic!] [...] by means of the number 13 or 15 in its upper section, and [show] the year in the four corners".[10] The hallmarks of different cities changed over time. The official symbol for Lemberg – the letter in the center – was an N from 1787–1806, a D from 1807–1866 and an F from 1866–1896.[11] Whether and in what way hallmarks were applied prior to the introduction of the law still needs to be analyzed using older silverware.[12] After 1806 other hallmarks that had the letter at the top instead of in the middle became standard.[13] In summary, the type of stamp that can be found on the Torah crown only existed between 1778 and 1806.

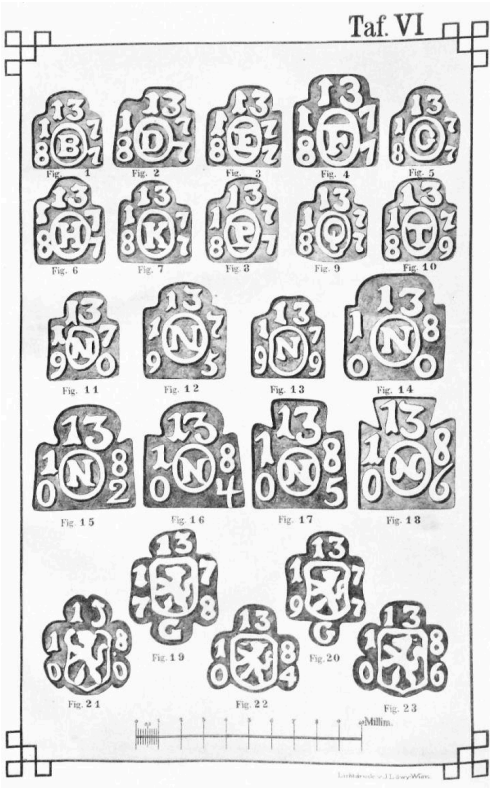

Table VI. Karl Knies, Die Punzirung in Oesterreich. Eine geschichtliche Studie, Wien 1896, Free access - no reuse

A further stamp was also discovered in the course of this research: a small square containing squashed and unidentifiable letters that was applied to one of the crown brackets. It is still unclear when or why this stamp was applied, or whether this might be a master's mark, since it was applied so conspicuously to the outside of the crown.

A careful inspection of the object thus revealed that the crown: 1. came from Lemberg, due to certain stylistic features and because of a duty stamp, and 2. was hallmarked between 1778

and 1806. If one combines these findings with the historical circumstances surrounding the place and time of manufacture, the picture becomes even clearer.

Torah crown, detail of the newly discovered stamp on one of the handles. Carolin Kayali, Free access - no reuse

The history of Jewish Lemberg

Lemberg was part of Poland until 1772. Jews had enjoyed privileges there since the middle of the 16th century thanks to decrees issued by the Polish aristocracy, and from the 17th century were able to practice skilled trades, something that was not possible in most other European countries.[14] Many Jewish people who were forcibly expelled from the German states or Bohemia emigrated to Poland on account of the relatively high level of autonomy they were able to enjoy.[15] This benefited the economies of the cities there. Jewish merchants and tradesmen became part of the middle class and competed economically with their Christian counterparts.[16] The fact that local laws put Jewish craftsmen and women on an equal footing with non-Jews in Poland during the 17th and 18th centuries enabled an increasing number of them to take up skilled trades and join guilds. Court factors or court Jews

Court factors or court Jews

Court factors or court Jews were Jewish merchants or lenders who worked in a close service relationship for a court. Particularly in the period between 1650 and 1800, Jews increasingly took up positions alongside rulers, advising them on financial matters (e.g. taxes, customs duties, law) or the procurement of (luxury) goods (jewellery, horses, military equipment). Cf. Rotraud Ries, Hoffaktoren, in: Dan Diner (ed.), Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur, vol. 3, Stuttgart 2014, pp. 85-89.

established contact with aristocratic customers, and as a result, Jewish (art and) craft products became distributed across all classes of society.[17] It is therefore highly likely that the Torah crown in the Jewish Museum Vienna also comes from a Jewish silversmith in what was then Poland (and possibly Lemberg). In 1772 Lemberg became the capital city of the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria, after it was annexed from the Habsburg Empire. At this time, Jewish merchants had a major influence on trade as a whole, making Lemberg a major commercial and administrative center for the north-east of the Habsburg Empire.[18] Lemberg was the fifth largest city of the multinational empire[19] and an important hub for the trading network of the monarchy. For example, there would have been regular exchanges between Lemberg and Vienna.[20] Under Empress Maria Theresia and later her son, Emperor Joseph II, the geography of the city, cultural institutions, the civil service and education were all changed; 1785 saw the introduction of Austrian jurisdiction and German as the official language.[21] At the same time Lemberg became one of the centres of Galician *Haskala* (Enlightenment), where famous enlighteners (*Maskilim*) such as Isaak Erter, Jehuda Leib Mieses and others lived.[22] The toleration edicts issued by Joseph II (1781 to 1790) were to contribute to the integration of Jews in bourgeois society and enable modernization.[23] The symbol of the double eagle that decorates the headband of the crown can also be interpreted in the context of this exchange between Vienna, seat of the Habsburgs, and Lemberg, capital of the annexed crown lands of Galicia and Lodomeria: for many centuries it was reserved for the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire and thus refers to the family of the Habsburgs, which provided the emperor almost continuously.[24] The double eagle appears on various Galician ritual objects at the end of the 18th and the start of the 19th century, and is often interpreted as a reference to the Habsburg Empire or later the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy. It is true that the symbol of a two-headed eagle was also used in other contexts – for example in the Byzantine Empire or as a symbol of the Russian Tsardom – but with this particular Torah crown, which, according to the Jewish Museum Vienna, was used in the Vienna Stadttempel from 1826, one may nonetheless assume that both of the ornamental double eagles on the front and rear side of the headband refer to the Habsburgs. One can also assume, with some certainty, that the order to create it was placed after the Austrian invasion of 1772. It is possible to imagine that those who commissioned it wanted to characterize themselves as Jewish citizens who were part of an enlightened society by identifying themselves with the Empire and its “tolerant” religious laws and educational initiatives. This indirect expression of

loyalty may have been continued after 1806 in the semi-private context of the Vienna salon and after 1826 in ritual use in the Vienna Stadttempel.[25]

Torah crown, detail of lower headband with double-headed eagle. Carolin Kayali, Free access - no reuse

Conclusion

A close inspection of the Torah crown reveals information which, considered within the historical context of 18th century Lemberg, produces new conclusions. It was possible to confirm that the piece came from Lemberg, as had already been assumed, thanks to the duty mark and the stylistic features that are typical of a Galician crown. The likely time of manufacture, which had been estimated as being between 1650/1700, can also be narrowed down or rede-fined: if one interprets the symbol of the double eagle in the ornamentation as an iconographic reference to the Habsburg Empire, then the object must have been produced in the period fol-lowing the Austrian occupation of Lemberg on the first partition of Poland in 1772. Both of the hallmarks that correspond to the provisions of the law of 1787 limit the time frame to 1787 to 1806. The figures 1 and 7 are relatively easy to make out, and thus point to a year in the range 1772 to 1799. If one considers further the intentions of those who commissioned the piece, for whom the crown could have been an indirect expression of loyalty to the Emperor and his reforms, then the dates of the toleration edicts become relevant. These were issued by Emperor Joseph II between 1781 and 1790. It is therefore

reasonable to date the Torah crown to around 1787. With respect to those who commissioned the piece, one may further assume that these were well-to-do and "enlightened" members of the community. It is clear from its precious and detailed craftsmanship that the crown is not something mass-produced but a val-uable commissioned work.

This research has exemplified how an object can provide the clues to its own past. By analyzing the object, it was possible to expand on the scant information available about the Torah crown with inventory number 1052 in the permanent exhibition at the Jewish Museum. Unfor-tunately, the current state of research about many items on display at the museum is still only fragmentary. Further research into Jewish ritual objects is essential, and in many cases, will lead to new academic findings.

English translation: Gwen Clayton ↗

Footnotes

1. Assumption made internally by the JMV. ↥
2. E.g. there is another example in the permanent display at the JMV which, at 43 cm, is almost twice as large: https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/keter-torah-crown/EwFQvJtfYXDprQ?hl=de. ↥
3. Yaniv 2007, p.52; Mann 2010. ↥
4. Kayser 1950, p. 495. ↥
5. This is an assumption made internally at the JMV. ↥
6. Knies 1896, p. 68. ↥
7. Ibid., p. 53. ↥
8. In this case 12 kr. CM. for 1 Loth of silver (convention currency of the Austrian Empire and the Austrian hereditary lands), cf. Knies 1896, p. 25. ↥
9. Knies 1896, p. 16. ↥
10. Ibid.: Knies assumes that the law was strictly obeyed only in Lemberg, since hallmarks from Lemberg have been observed for every year up to 1806, while for most other cities only the year 1787, the year in which the law was introduced, is represented. ↥
11. Knies 1896, p. 53. ↥
12. I am not aware of any comparable crowns originating from Lemberg with a verified dated of 1787 and with silversmith's marks, which would be necessary for a complete analysis. From 1867 there are hallmarks on older items indicating that gold and silver items were made prior to the new law coming into effect (Knies 1896, p. 49, Tafel X). It is possible that there were earlier laws (i.e. 1778) and items with similar markings. ↥
13. Knies 1896, s. 71 und Table III. ↥
14. Krachkovska 2006, pp. 33–38; Caro 1894, p. 19 and p. 24. ↥
15. Ibid. ↥

16. Ibid. ↥
17. Silver, pp. 535-536. ↥
18. Kohlbauer-Fritz, Geschichte, p. 17; Caro, Lemberg, p. 111. ↥
19. The following areas belonged to the Habsburg Empire at the end of the 18th century: Archduchy of Austria below the Enns (today Lower Austria), Archduchy of Austria above the Enns (today Upper), Duchy of Styria, Duchy of Carinthia, Duchy of Carniola, Kingdom of Bohemia, Margraviate of Moravia, Duchy of Silesia, Kingdom of Hungary (with Croatia and Slavonia), Duchy of Bukovina (from 1775), Crown lands of Galicia and Lodomeria (from 1772). Commercial and cultural exchange took place between the cities of the Habsburg Empire. ↥
20. For an overview of the chronological history of Lemberg see: Cat.Exhib. Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien 1993, pp. 42–57 and Kohlbauer-Fritz 1993, pp. 17–22. ↥
21. Cat.Exhib. 1993, pp. 42- 57. ↥
22. Kohlbauer-Fritz 1993, p. 17. ↥
23. Hecht 2014, p. 139. This period of history is often represented as if Joseph II and the Habsburg regime were the "saviours" of the Jews. However, these developments did not bring only good, but also restrictions and a split within the Jewish community. ↥
24. Weyss 1988, p. 37. ↥
25. Heimann-Jelinek, Judaica, p. 159. ↥

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