Sacred Splendor: Jewish Ritual Art and Christian Treasures from St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague is made possible by Lilly Endowment Inc.

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Sacred Splendor: Jewish Ritual Art and Christian Treasures from St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague has been organized in collaboration with the Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague. This presentation builds on *Fragments of Memory*, a 2024 exhibition at the Kunsthalle im Lipsiusbau in Dresden, Germany, and its 2026 iteration at the Prague Castle Riding School, both curated by Jiří Fajt.

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“No other city can match hundred-spire Prague; nature gave it all that lies in the world. It is a home to insightful people and the weather conditions are favorable; the fields yield grapes as well as grain. It is a home to the emperor, the Muses and Themis, which one does not find elsewhere; here is the entire world.”

—Jan Campanus Vodňanský (1572–1622)

Sacred Splendor presents an unexpected pairing, bringing together Christian treasures from St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague and rare medieval and early modern Jewish ceremonial art from Central Europe. Exquisitely crafted works in gold, silver, parchment, silk, and stone reveal the shared visual and material world of two distinct traditions. The setting for this encounter is Prague, a city of major religious and cultural significance for Jews and Christians. Jews have lived in Prague since at least the thirteenth century, when the Altneuschul, the oldest active synagogue in Europe, was built. The Jewish community flourished despite recurring persecution and expulsion, which accounts for the few surviving works of Jewish ritual art from medieval Prague.

Charles IV (r. 1346–1378) was the first ruler to make Prague the spiritual and political center of Europe and the capital of the Holy Roman Empire, a vast realm that encompassed present-day Czech Republic and Germany, bordering France on the west and Poland on the east. The emperor sought to transform Prague into the “New Jerusalem” and St. Vitus Cathedral into the imperial church and one of Europe’s great repositories for relics—the remains of Christian saints or objects that came into contact with them. Under Charles IV and later Rudolf II, the city emerged as a hub for sacred art and artistic patronage. Prague’s position at the crossroads of Central European trade routes drew artists, materials, and objects into a dynamic relationship between court, workshop, and city.

Within the empire, Jews lived in a Christian-majority society under conditions that varied by place and period. They participated in the cultural and economic life of the cities they called home, even as they faced intense discrimination. Because Jews were excluded from many professional guilds, Jewish patrons often commissioned works from Christian artisans. Thus, ceremonial art made for Jewish and Christian communities frequently shared styles and materials.

Despite visual connections, these objects served different ritual purposes. In Christianity, relics housed in elaborate reliquaries and displayed in churches and public spaces became the focus of devotion and pilgrimages. In Judaism, ritual has revolved for centuries around the Torah—the first five books of the Hebrew Bible that narrate the history of the Israelites and serve as a foundational guide for Jewish practice. Handwritten in scroll form for public reading in the synagogue, the Torah has long been the focus of beautification. Ceremonial objects were developed over time to preserve and protect its sanctity, facilitate its reading, and emphasize its majesty. Rather than being anchored to a single sacred site, Torah adornments were shaped by local custom and the transmission of a shared textual tradition across generations.

Sacred Splendor also tells a story of loss and survival. The medieval Jewish-owned treasures in this exhibition found in Środa Śląska, Poland, and Weißenfels, Erfurt, and Lingenfeld, Germany, were buried during times of violence and upheaval and recovered centuries later. Today they carry the memory of vibrant medieval Jewish communities that were dispersed or destroyed. Shown in this exhibition with Christian reliquaries that remained under the protection of the Church, these objects illuminate two histories of preservation and endurance.

Claudia J. Nahson
Morris and Eva Feld Senior Curator

Abigail Rapoport
Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Curator of Judaica

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Exhibition continues on Floor 3

The artists Hannah Altman and Afruz Amighi respond to *Sacred Splendor: Jewish Ritual Art and Christian Treasures from St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague.*

Reliquaries

These two reliquary monstrances were created as St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague was being built and they reflect a growing medieval emphasis on the visual encounter with sacred objects. Their vertical forms with pointed spires, elongated arch windows, and external support system using flying buttresses echo the architecture of the cathedral and are meant to evoke a heavenly realm. At the same time, the openwork design of these objects allows for the relics and the Host—the consecrated wafer understood in Christianity as the body of Christ—to be seen. From the Latin *monstrare* (to show), monstrances developed in the thirteenth century as vessels designed to display the Host during Mass and processions. The arm-shaped reliquary, also on view here, represents an earlier type. Although the relic is enclosed and not meant to be visible, its Gothic architectural base is inspired by medieval cathedrals.

Reliquary monstrance with the Parler family coat of arms, c. 1370–80

Prague

Gilt silver and rock crystal

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This reliquary monstrance was a prestigious commission associated with the Parler family of master builders. The coat of arms on the base indicates that the object was likely donated by Peter Parler, the Master Builder of St. Vitus Cathedral, who was overseeing the cathedral's construction at the time. The coat of arms incorporates the square-edge ruler that served as Parler's stonemason mark in earlier architectural projects.

Reliquary monstrance of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, c. 1370–80

Prague

Cast, pierced, and gilt silver, rock crystal

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Saint Catherine of Alexandria, holding the wheel and sword associated with her martyrdom, appears beneath a Gothic arch and above the crystal chamber containing the relics. The reliquary was likely commissioned by Holy Roman emperor Charles IV, who was particularly devoted to Saint Catherine after young Charles's victory at the battle of San Felice in Italy in 1332, which took place on her feast day, November 25.

Arm reliquary of Saint George, 1270s (reliquary), tenth–twelfth century (silk)

Reliquary: Prague; silk: Asia; sapphire: probably France

Gilt silver, amethyst cabochons, sapphire, modern glass and doublets, rock crystal, silver pearls, and silk

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

The shape of this extraordinary reliquary emulates that of the relic believed to be within: a bone from the right arm of Saint George, an early Christian martyr whose cult spread from Byzantium to Europe. Rather than the familiar Western image of the knight slaying the dragon, Saint George is depicted here in the Byzantine tradition, wearing scale armor and holding a staff with a banner and a shield. The reliquary's four-sided turreted base features gem-studded portals that evoke Heavenly Jerusalem, transforming the saint's remains into a vision of sacred space. In medieval Jewish and Christian art, the motif of the gate often symbolized the entry to a spiritual realm.

SACRED ART IN THE GOTHIC CITY

By the late thirteenth century, Gothic architecture had transformed Prague. Stained-glass windows filled church interiors with kaleidoscopic light, symbolically understood as divine presence, that altered the experience of sacred space. Soaring towers shaped the skyline of the medieval city. Jewish communities lived as a minority within this Christian urban environment and were surrounded by these Gothic forms.

Charles IV, king of Bohemia and Holy Roman emperor (r. 1346–1378), turned St. Vitus Cathedral into Prague's spiritual center in the fourteenth century. He rebuilt and expanded it as a grand Gothic monument—following the model of the great French royal cathedrals—converting a centuries-old sacred site into the primary European seat of imperial and religious authority. Within the Prague Castle grounds, the cathedral—still active today—was the coronation and burial church of Bohemian rulers and housed the kingdom's most important relics, treasures, and regalia. Across the city, the Altneuschul had served as the heart of Jewish communal and ritual life since the late thirteenth century. Now a historic landmark in Prague's Jewish Quarter (Josefov), the Altneuschul is the oldest synagogue in Europe still in use today and an early example of the Gothic architectural style used in a Jewish context.

In medieval Europe, Jewish houses of worship were generally subject to restrictions on scale and height to prevent them from visually dominating nearby churches. Yet within these constraints, Gothic features—framed portals, window tracery, and lavish capitals—adorned synagogues and their ritual furnishings. In Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, too, Jewish spirituality met the visual glory of the Gothic heavenly city in a format that could be carried across Europe. The portability of books was critical to Jewish communities so often displaced and exiled. Whether Christian reliquaries or later Jewish spice containers, these ceremonial objects share a Gothic visual language that endured beyond the Middle Ages.

Gold-glass base, fourth century CE

Rome

Blown glass, gold leaf, and paint

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Acquired in 1966 through the generosity of Jakob Michael, New York, in memory of his wife, Erna Sondheimer-Michael; restituted in 2008 to the heirs to the Dzialynska Collection, Gołuchów Castle, Poland, the owners prior to World War II; reacquired in 2008 through the generosity of: Ingeborg and Ira Leon Rennert, New York; The Legacy Heritage Fund, New York; Dr. Daniel Rosenberg, Lyon, France, in memory of his wife, Jacqueline; and anonymous friends of the Israel Museum

This gold-glass base bears one of the earliest known depictions of a Torah ark, which is shown open to reveal the Torah scrolls and is flanked by lions. Below the Torah ark, two menorahs and the lulav, etrog, and shofar recall ancient Temple rituals. Much of this imagery in the Jewish Diaspora first emerged in Rome, spreading to later synagogue art. Jews exiled there, after the Roman sack of Jerusalem in 70 CE, would have carried the memory of the recently destroyed Temple. A Greek inscription in Latin letters reads, “Drink, that you may live,” suggesting this glass piece was the base of a drinking vessel before being used in burial. While similar objects appear in Christian catacombs, the symbols in this example evoke Jewish hope for the Temple’s restoration.

Otto Kirchgraber (engraver)

Staranová Synagogue [Altneuschul], Prague, nineteenth century

Prague

Etching

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

František Václav Šír (engraver, 1804–1864)

After Josef Mánes (artist, 1820–1871)

Interior of the Altneuschul, Prague, c. 1840

Prague

Lithograph

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

L. Thumling (engraver)
After Josef Mánes (artist, 1820–1871)
Wolf Pascheles (publisher, 1814–1857)

Interior view of the Altneuschul in Prague, c. 1850

Prague
Lithograph

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

These nineteenth-century prints depict the Altneuschul (Old-New Synagogue) in Prague, the oldest extant and still active synagogue in Europe, completed around 1270. A capital from the synagogue is on display nearby. The Altneuschul survived the Holocaust as part of Prague's Central Jewish Museum, founded in 1942 by the Nazi authorities, who perversely sought to salvage and document Jewish culture as they were decimating the Jewish communities throughout Europe. The synagogue continues to serve Prague's Jewish community today.

Capital of a supporting column decorated with bundles of oak leaves with acorns, from the Church of Saint Salvator in the Convent of Saint Agnes of Bohemia, Prague, c. 1265

Marly limestone

The National Museum of the Czech Republic

Double capital from a window column with berry motifs, from the presbytery of the Church of Saint Salvator in the Convent of Saint Agnes of Bohemia, Prague, c. 1265

Marly limestone with later coating

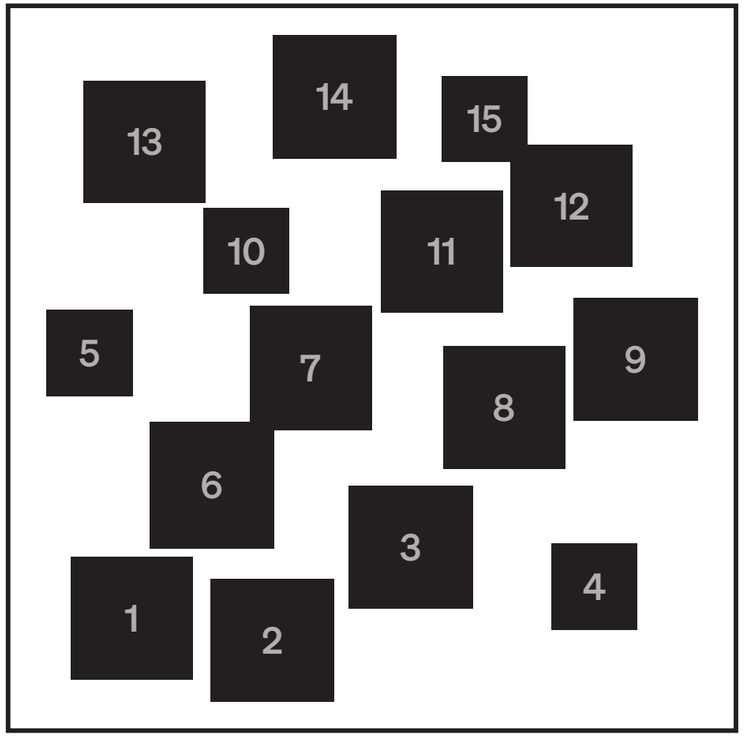
The National Museum of the Czech Republic

Capital of a supporting column decorated with sycamore (?) leaves, from the Altneuschul, Prague, 1250–1300

Prague
Marly limestone

The City of Prague Museum

These capitals, one from Prague's Altneuschul (Old-New Synagogue) and two from the nearby Convent of Saint Agnes of Bohemia, were carved by the same workshop of Christian masons active in thirteenth-century Prague. Because Jews were barred from the Christian craft guilds that controlled building trades, synagogue patrons employed the same craftsmen who built the city's Gothic churches to construct Jewish houses of worship. The capital's curling vines, lifelike leaves, and intricately carved forms are characteristic of the Gothic style that shaped both Jewish and Christian spaces in medieval Prague, while meeting their different ritual needs.



Gothic Tower–Shaped Spice Containers

Spice containers in the shape of Gothic towers became a distinctive form of Jewish ceremonial art in Bohemia, Moravia, and the Germanic Lands. There are examples that date as early as the sixteenth century. Filled with fragrant spices such as cloves, myrtle, or nutmeg, the containers were used during Havdalah, a ceremony that marks the transition from the Sabbath to the weekday through blessings and smelling of aromatics. Like the large Christian sacrament house displayed nearby, these miniature towers transform familiar structures into expressions of the sacred. Several spice towers shown here carry histories of survival, including objects salvaged from Jewish communities destroyed during the Holocaust and later preserved through efforts to reconstruct Jewish cultural heritage after the war.

1.

Spice container, 1700–1750

Schwäbisch Gmünd (now in Germany)

Filigreed silver, semiprecious stone, possibly glass, and enamel plaques

The Jewish Museum, New York, Purchase: Purim Ball Fund, JM 24-64a-b
Provenance: unknown owner; collection of Michael M. Zagayski (1895–1967); purchased by the Jewish Museum, Parke-Bernet Gallery, New York, 1964

2.

Spice container, c. 1550, repairs and additions 1650–51

Probably Frankfurt

Traced, pierced, cast, and parcel-gilt silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, JM 23-52
Provenance: Frankfurt Jewish Community; unknown owner; heirless object salvaged from post-Nazi Europe by the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR), the cultural arm of the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JSRO); transferred to the Jewish Museum, 1952

The earliest of its type known to exist, this tower-shaped spice container was used for the Havdalah ceremony during which the spices are smelled, marking the end of the Sabbath and the start of a new week. The first spice containers looked like miniature towers or censers used to burn church incense. Christian craftsmen, incorporating forms known to them, likely made such ritual objects because Jews were banned from professional guilds. During a later repair, a Hebrew inscription dated to 1650–51 (5411 in the Jewish calendar) was added with the name of a later owner, “Rekhlah daughter of Eliezer Dayan.” The object was then owned by the Jewish community in Frankfurt. Following the destruction of that Jewish community during the Holocaust, the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction agency redistributed the heirloom to the Jewish Museum.

3.

Spice container, eighteenth century

Holy Roman Empire

Repoussé, pierced, cast, and engraved silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 2962
Provenance: unknown owner; acquired by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1952

4.

Spice container, c. 1580

Holy Roman Empire

Cast and engraved silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 3874
Provenance: unknown owner; acquired by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1963

5.

Spice container, c. 1725

Frankfurt

Pierced, cast, and engraved silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, JM 34-52
Provenance: unknown owner; heirless object salvaged from post-Nazi Europe by the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR), the cultural arm of the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JSRO); transferred to the Jewish Museum, 1953

6.

Marx Weinold Successors (active in 1700–1747)

Spice container, 1730s

Augsburg (now in Germany)

Cast, chased, and pierced silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, JM 35-52
Provenance: unknown owner; Sigmund Nauheim (died in 1935); bequeathed to the Museum of Jewish Antiquities, Frankfurt, in 1936 (museum destroyed in 1938); heirless object salvaged from post-Nazi Europe by the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR), the cultural arm of the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JSRO); transferred to the Jewish Museum, 1951

7.

Rötger Herfurth (1722–1776, master in 1748)

Spice container, c. 1748–76

Frankfurt

Cast, pierced, engraved, and stippled silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 4391
Provenance: unknown owner; J. J. Klejman Gallery, New York (operated 1950–74); purchased by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1957

8.

Josef Ruhmann (1800–1885)

Spice container, 1861

Brno (now in Czech Republic)

Filigreed silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, U 7614
Provenance: unknown owner; heirless object salvaged from post-Nazi Europe by the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR), the cultural arm of the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JSRO); transferred to the Jewish Museum, 1950s–60s

9.

Spice container, c. 1770

Holy Roman Empire

Pierced, engraved, and repoussé silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 4068
Provenance: unknown owner; Sigmund Seligsberger (a furniture and art dealer, murdered in Sobibor death camp, Poland, 1943); unknown owner; Frederick Wolff; purchased by Dr. Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1956

10.

Spice container, 1806–7

Brno (now in Czech Republic)

Filigreed silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry Friedenwald, JM 102-47
Provenance: unknown owner; Dr. Harry Friedenwald (1864–1940), Baltimore; donated to the Jewish Museum, 1947

11.

Paulus Friedrich Bierfreund (1764–1816, master in 1796)

Spice container, 1805–8

Nuremberg

Pierced, chased, and repoussé silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 334
Provenance: unknown owner; acquired by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1940s–50s

12.

Johann Conrad Weiss (1670–1758, master in 1699)

Spice container, c. 1740

Nuremberg

Pierced, chased, and repoussé silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 383
Provenance: unknown owner; acquired by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1940s–50s

13.

Spice container, late eighteenth–early nineteenth century

Bohemia (now in Czech Republic), Moravia (now in Czech Republic), or Poland

Filigreed silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of the Danzig Jewish Community, D 191
Provenance: unknown owner; Lesser Giełdziński Collection; donated to the Synagogue and Jewish Community of Danzig, 1904; transferred to the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, 1939; accessioned by the Jewish Museum, 1954

14.

Spice container, 1869–72

Brno (now in Czech Republic)

Filigreed silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, JM 28-61
Provenance: unknown owner; heirless object salvaged from post-Nazi Europe by the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR), the cultural arm of the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JSRO); transferred to the Jewish Museum, 1961

15.

Spice container, eighteenth century

Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)

Filigreed and cast silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 2655
Provenance: unknown owner; purchased by Dr. Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1950

Master Wenceslas

Sacrament house, c. 1375

Prague

Gilded iron

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

At first glance, this monumental, gilded iron structure looks like a model of a Gothic cathedral, but is a sacrament house, designed to hold the consecrated Host, the bread believed to become the body of Christ during the Catholic Mass. The sacred object was created for St. Vitus Cathedral's chapel devoted to Saint Wenceslas, the patron saint of Bohemia, where it has stood for more than six hundred years. Its pointed arches, delicate tracery, rose windows, and soaring pinnacles faithfully replicate the architecture of the cathedral at the scale of a precious vessel. Centuries later, the relationship was reversed: When work resumed on the unfinished cathedral of St. Vitus in the nineteenth century, the architects looked to this remarkably intact sacrament house as a guide for the building's completion.

202 AD 900

Dionysio Miseroni (1607–1661)

Sacrament house (tabernacle), 1644–50

Prague

Oak paneled with agate, jasper, araucarite, flint, and slate; gilded copper; and Bohemian garnets

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Following the sixteenth-century Council of Trent, the Host was moved from freestanding sacrament houses, such as the large medieval example on view above at left, into permanent altar containers, giving rise to a new form: the closed tabernacle. One of Prague's most celebrated gemcutters, Dionysio Miseroni, created this extraordinary work from Bohemian stones likely for Prague Castle; the tabernacle was later installed in the Saint Wenceslas Chapel at St. Vitus Cathedral.

David Bar Pesah (scribe and artist)

Mahzor (festival prayer book), fourteenth century

Germanic Lands

Ink and gouache on parchment

Dorot Jewish Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Mahzor (festival prayer book), 1290

Esslingen (now in Germany)
Ink, gouache, and gold on parchment

Library of the University of Wrocław

This illuminated page from a two-volume festival prayer book (mahzor) introduces *Sha'arei Rahamim* ("the Gates of Mercy"), a prayer that is recited as the Torah ark is opened at the synagogue on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Like on the page nearby, the enlarged Hebrew word *sha'arei* for "gates" is framed by a Gothic architectural portal recalling both the Torah ark and the entrance to the innermost sanctum of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. Here, the four living creatures—a man, lion, ox, and eagle—from Ezekiel's vision of God's heavenly throne appear in medallions. Christianity adopted these celestial beings to represent the Four Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, respectively. A golden throne above reinforces the connection between the synagogue's Torah ark and God's heavenly realm.

Solomon ben Neriyah (scribe)

Hebrew Bible, 1313

Germanic Lands

Ink, gouache, and gold on parchment

Scheide Library, Princeton University Library

A Gothic architectural portal frames a single Hebrew word in gold—*eleh* ("these"), the first word of the opening verse of Deuteronomy: "These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel." In this biblical book, Moses reiterates God's laws before the Israelites enter the land of Canaan, promised by God to their ancestors. A pointed, leafy archway and decorated columns resemble the Gothic architecture of Prague's Altneuschul synagogue, from which a carved capital is on view in this exhibition. This imagery transforms the page into a sacred space, inviting readers to approach the biblical text as they would a holy place.

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Architectural fragments from the Torah reading platform (bimah) of the medieval synagogue of Cologne, 1270–80

Cologne (now in Germany)
Baumberger sandstone

Romano-Germanic Museum of the City of Cologne

These carved sandstone fragments were discovered during excavations of the site where Cologne's medieval Jewish Quarter once stood. They were part of the bimah, or Torah reading platform, in the city's medieval synagogue, now destroyed. During a late thirteenth-century renovation, the bimah was embellished with carved floral and animal motifs, including the monkey head shown here, echoing the decoration of nearby illuminated mahzorim (festival prayer books) from the same period. This kind of ornamentation raised questions about the use of three-dimensional imagery in Jewish sacred spaces, given the biblical prohibitions against graven images, such as statues or idols. Rabbinical discussions cite the precedent of the cherubim, or winged creatures, that adorned the biblical Ark of the Covenant built to contain the Tablets of Law with the Ten Commandments.

Torah ark curtain, 1704–5

Prague

Velvet, satin, and fringe

Jewish Museum in Prague

A curtain hangs in front of the Torah ark, where the scrolls are stored when not in use. This sumptuous example is from the Great Court Synagogue (Velkodvorská Synagoga) of Prague, established in 1627. As stated in the Hebrew inscription at its top, the curtain was donated by the Holy Society of Psalm Singers, a communal brotherhood. The composition is organized as an architectural facade: foliate columns rise on either side, their exuberant vegetal forms terminating in ornamental capitals. Together, these elements convey the curtain as a symbolic threshold, evoking the ancient Temple in Jerusalem and marking the transition into the sanctified space associated with the Torah ark.

Kalonymus ben Judah (scribe and artist)

Esslingen Mahzor (festival prayer book), 1290

Esslingen (now in Germany)

Ink, gouache, and gold on parchment

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

One of two volumes, this richly illuminated mahzor preserves the liturgy for the High Holidays and was intended for the cantor's use in the synagogue. Here, the opening words of a Rosh Hashanah hymn appear within a Gothic architectural gate, transforming the page into a threshold. The arches frame the phrase, "King who helps, saves, and shields," placing divine sovereignty at the center of communal prayer. At the bottom, fantastical creatures support the portal, guarding this passage between earthly and sacred realms.

CHURCH AND SYNAGOGUE IN MEDIEVAL ART

In the Middle Ages art played an important role in giving visual form to Christian beliefs. The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament in Christianity) recounts how the binding commitment between God and the people of Israel—the covenant—is solidified. As Christianity took shape, it increasingly viewed itself as the fulfillment of this covenant and the heir to Judaism's sacred history. Early and medieval Christian theologians turned to genealogy to trace a continuous line from the biblical patriarchs to Christ and the Church. Over time, this thinking moved beyond scripture into imagery and relics. Venerated in Christian tradition as connected to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, the relics displayed in this gallery were part of this effort: physical objects meant to root Christianity in the ancient authority of Judaism's founding figures.

At times, however, the relationship between Judaism and Christianity became more polarized, particularly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when Christian public imagery deepened and reinforced growing theological tensions. The Crusades, a series of Christian military campaigns launched to reclaim the Holy Land, brought destruction to Jewish communities. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 further restricted Jewish life by mandating that Jews be visibly marked with a discriminatory badge, making them vulnerable to attack.

Barred from many professions, Jews were often pushed into moneylending, as Christians were not allowed to lend money at interest. The development of European cities and trade growth often necessitated financing by Jewish individuals, fueling negative stereotypes, including depictions of Jews holding coin bags and, more grotesquely, consorting with pigs, an animal considered impure in Judaism. Church portals featured the antagonistic personifications of the Church (Ecclesia) and the Synagogue (Synagoga). The former was depicted as triumphant and crowned, the latter as blindfolded and downcast, her crown falling from her head, and the Tablets of the Law slipping from her grasp. Widely disseminated, such images helped normalize anti-Jewish attitudes and at times contributed to violence that destabilized Jewish life in medieval Europe.

Leaf from a missal with historiated initials of a priest celebrating mass, the Church (Ecclesia), and the Synagogue (Synagoga), late thirteenth–early fourteenth century

Beauvais (now in France)

Ink, tempera, gold on vellum

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Milton Freudenheim in memory of Otto Ege

This illuminated page illustrates the Eucharist, the most sacred portion of the Mass in Christian medieval liturgy when the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Above, a priest celebrates Mass at the altar. The allegorical figures of the Church (*Ecclesia*) and the Synagogue (*Synagoga*) articulate a medieval Christian understanding in which the Church saw itself as the heir to, and as fulfilling, the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible. Crowned *Ecclesia* holds a Gothic sacrament house containing the Eucharist that, within this Christian visual tradition, becomes associated with the biblical Ark of the Covenant, the sacred container of the Tablets of the Law. In the image, *Synagoga* lets the same Tablets slip from her hand. This gesture and her translucent blindfold hint to her potential acceptance of Christ, which remains unfulfilled.

Triptych, 1250–60

Possibly Picardy (now in France)
Gilt and painted elephant ivory with metal mounts

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917

Triptychs like this one are composed of a central panel with the main scenes—here the Crucifixion and the Virgin and Child with angels—flanked by two wings, which are often decorated on both sides for open and closed viewing. Given its intimate scale, this intricately carved example was likely meant for private devotion. On the wings are personifications of the Church (Ecclesia), erect and holding a miniature church building and a banner, and the Synagogue (Synagoga), downcast and blinded, her crown slipping and her hands clasping the Tablets of the Law. The portability of this and other similar works would have disseminated this antagonistic pairing throughout Europe, fueling anti-Jewish sentiment.

Pyx, twelfth century

Lower Saxony, possibly Hildesheim (now in Germany)
Gilt copper, champlevé and cloisonné enamel, wood core (modern)

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund and the Fanny Tewksbury King Collection by exchange

A pyx contains the wafer or Host that becomes consecrated as the body of Christ during the Sacrament of Communion in Catholic Mass. For Christian worshippers, taking communion represents a personal connection to Christ's sacrifice, alluded to by the Crucifixion depicted on the object's lid. A crowned woman personifying the Church (*Ecclesia*) stands to the right of the crucified Christ, holding a banner and raising a chalice to receive the blood issuing from his side. A blindfolded woman personifying the Synagogue (*Synagoga*) at the left of Christ is the only figure devoid of a halo. Walking away, she points at the scene, as Christ turns toward *Ecclesia*. On the sides are two scenes of sacrifice from the Hebrew Bible—the Old Testament, in Christianity—believed to foreshadow the Crucifixion: At left Abel offers a sheep, and at right an angel intervenes as Abraham is about to kill his son Isaac.

Two-handled dish with Judensau ("Jewish sow") image, 1694

Vienna

Repoussé silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 2951
Provenance: unknown owner; Roderick von Walterskirchen; sold Vienna, 1889; unknown owner;
Dr. Albert Figdor (1843–1927); sold by Paul Cassirer, Berlin, 1930; unknown owner; purchased by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1952

One of the most extreme examples of medieval anti-Jewish imagery, *Judensau* (German for "Jewish sow") iconography encompassed various humiliating and grotesque depictions of Jews, appearing on medieval church exteriors, choir stalls, and printed books. Jews were presented engaging in obscene acts with pigs, an animal considered impure in Judaism. This late seventeenth-century dish containing the *Judensau* attests to the persistence of such imagery beyond the Middle Ages.

Virgin Mary on a lion throne, Rengersdorf church, Lower Silesia, c. 1360–70

Kłodzko or Wrocław (both now in Poland)
Linden wood

Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg

Holding the Christ Child, Mary is seated on a throne that rests on two lions evoking the biblical throne of King Solomon. This composition is based on the Throne of Wisdom—an earlier type in which the Virgin served as living throne for her young son, who embodied wisdom. This theme further developed during the reign of Charles IV, who billed himself as a wise monarch and "the new Solomon." The lion serves both as the symbol of his kingdom of Bohemia and the biblical tribe of Judah from which Christ (as Christian messiah) stemmed according to the Church.

205 AD 901

Box with relics of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, c. 1350–1400

Prague

Gilt silver

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

The Tombs of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs in Hebron—a holy site for Judaism and later for Christianity and Islam, the three Abrahamic religions—fell under Christian purview in the early twelfth century as the Crusades were unfolding. The traffic of relics from the Holy Land to Europe and Christian Byzantium was particularly heavy then. These relics were a gift in possibly 1371–72 to St. Vitus Cathedral treasury from Charles IV, King of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor, who was said to have received them from the Byzantine emperor John V Palaiologos. Relics associated with foundational figures of Judaism, such as the patriarchs, reaffirmed for the Christian Church its legitimacy as heir to this sacred biblical history or Abrahamic legacy.

Reliquary with a fragment of the staff of Saint Peter, before 1355, assembled 1450–1500

Prague

Parcel-gilt silver and wood

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Relic of the Staff of Moses, possibly Late Antique (c. third–seventh century CE)

Eastern Mediterranean

Light and dark wood (possibly ebony) and ivory

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

In the biblical Book of Exodus, Moses parts the Red Sea with his staff as the Israelites journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom and strikes a rock to provide them with water in the desert. Moses also ensures their victory against the Amalekites by holding his staff aloft during battle. Likely a segment from a Late Antique scepter, this relic is identified by a late Latin inscription—"from the Staff of Moses." In a Christian context, stories of a physical staff associated with Moses go as far back as the fourth-century reign of Roman Emperor Constantine I. A rare holding in the treasury of St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague, this relic was a gift of King of Bohemia Charles IV in 1354. Probably that same year the king also donated the relic of Saint Peter's staff displayed nearby. Both objects strengthen the lineage the Church sought to establish with Peter as the new spiritual leader and Moses's heir.

Table reliquary (staurotheque), from the former Abbey of Saint Martin, Trier, 1266

Trier (now in Germany)
Oak, gold, gilded silver, gems, and rock crystal

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Embossed in gold and decorated with more than three hundred gems, this extraordinary reliquary has as its focal point the Crucifixion with the Virgin Mary and Saint John beneath the Cross. For the Church, Christ's sacrifice fulfilled prophecies foretold in the Hebrew Bible and redeemed humankind from sin.

Fragments thought to be from the True Cross—the cross on which Jesus was crucified—are among Christianity's most treasured relics. According to Christian tradition, Saint Helena, the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine I, discovered the True Cross in Jerusalem in the fourth century and took some pieces of the sacred object to Constantinople. After being looted as prized gifts, these relics circulated across Europe among emperors, rulers, churches, and monasteries.

Table reliquaries such as this one, known as staurotheques (from the Greek *stauros* [cross] and *theke* [container]), were specifically created to house fragments of the True Cross. Through rock crystal panes, forty additional relics are visible. An inscription dated 1266 records a monk's donation of this reliquary to the Benedictine monastery of Saint Martin in Trier, while cursing any robber who may attempt its theft.

PLAGUE AND PERSECUTION

When the Black Death, a deadly plague, swept across Europe in the late 1340s, fear and uncertainty overwhelmed already fragile relations between Jews and Christians. Jews were falsely accused of poisoning water wells and causing the devastating pandemic. Widespread attacks and expulsions brought about the destruction of long-established Jewish communities throughout Central European regions ruled by Charles IV.

The objects presented in this gallery—hoards of silver, coins, and jewelry—were buried by affluent Jewish families who hoped to return to retrieve them. Unlike Christian treasures, such as the reliquaries from St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague that were protected by the Church for centuries, the Jewish-owned hoards survived only through concealment. These items were recovered centuries later, usually as fragments during modern-day urban reconstruction. Hidden for survival and preserved by chance, these objects are tangible traces of lives shattered by persecution and bear witness to the resilience of medieval Jewish communities across Central Europe.

Despite instability and growing violence, Jewish scholarship thrived before the Black Death. On view is a 1204 manuscript of the Mahzor Vitry, one of the earliest liturgical compendiums of Central European (Ashkenazi) Jewry. This seminal work survived the last expulsion of the Jews from France in 1394, when it was taken to Italy. Two contemporary artworks featured in this gallery from the Jewish Museum collection by the artist Edmund de Waal address more recent periods of discrimination and tragedy in Jewish history, offering meditations on the enduring presence of the past.

Elijah ben Mordechai (scribe)

Mahzor (festival prayer book), 1279

Bamberg (now in Germany)

Ink on parchment

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

In this page, the illustrated Hebrew word *zakhor* (remember) introduces the liturgical poem for Shabbat Zakhor (Sabbath of Remembrance), which precedes Purim, the holiday that commemorates the deliverance of Persian Jewry from annihilation. The medallion depicts a Jewish figure at right with a bird's head that wears the pointed hat (*Judenhut*) mandated for Jews in Germanic Lands, and at left a reptilian figure wearing a knight's helmet that evokes Christian rule. The bird's head may have addressed biblical prohibitions against idolatry and debates about images. Created in Bamberg amid increasing hostility toward its Jewish community, the mahzor was made just before 175 Jews were murdered there in 1298, making the reading particularly resonant.

Three Accounts About Jews from Prague Who Were Saved from Danger, eighteenth century

Prague

Ink on paper

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

Written by an anonymous author in Judeo-German with some Hebrew, this manuscript contains three accounts of anti-Jewish incidents that took place in Prague between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries. One occurred in 1369, during the reign of Charles IV, when a Christian baker attempted to poison Jews with bread he had baked for after Passover. This incident is a rare reversal of the blood libel narrative that accused Jews of allegedly using Christian blood for the baking of the Passover bread (matzah).

Hebrew chronicle, c. 1615

Prague

Ink on paper

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

The anonymous author of this chronicle sets out to recount “the expulsions, miracles, and news of other occurrences befalling [the Jews] in Prague and other lands of our long exile . . . to serve as a token of remembrance for us and our descendants forever.” The first entry records the murder of many Jews of Prague on the last day of Passover in 1389, after they were accused of allegedly desecrating the Host. Earlier anti-Jewish events, listed in a different hand, go as far back as the First Crusade of 1096, recounting the killings of Jews in Speyer, Mainz, and Worms, main centers of medieval Jewish life in the Rhineland.

Siddur (prayer book) with liturgical poems, 1294–1325

Gouache on parchment

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

Liturgical poems for holidays and special Sabbaths comprise this intimate siddur or prayer book meant for personal use. The page at right illustrates the three main rituals that usher in the Sabbath. At left is the lighting of the Sabbath lamp—a similar one is on view in this gallery. The couple at the table raise their cups for the kiddush or benediction over wine, while two loaves of hallah bread covered by a textile are yet to be blessed. The women's barbette—a linen band passed under their chin—was fashionable when this manuscript was created. The man's pointed hat, however, was then mandatory for Jews in the Germanic Lands to differentiate them from Christians.

Simhah ben Samuel of Vitry (author, died in 1105)
Eliezer bar Samuel (scribe)

Mahzor Vitry (liturgical compendium), 1204

France

Ink on parchment

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

Micrography, the use of minute script to create designs, is often found in Hebrew manuscripts. Here at left, the customs for Sukkot—a holiday commemorating the Israelites' dwelling in booths (*sukkot*) in the desert during their Exodus from Egypt—are rendered in micrography. The scribe shaped the text into his name: "Eliezer bar Samuel, strength and be strong." At bottom are illustrations associated with secular pursuits in medieval Christian society, including a hunting scene with a knight on horse. Written by Simhah ben Samuel of Vitry, who was a disciple of the esteemed rabbinical authority Rashi (Solomon ben Isaac), the *Mahzor Vitry* is one of the earliest surviving liturgical works from Franco-German Jewry. During the Middle Ages many of these communities were destroyed due to violence and expulsion.

Edmund de Waal (born in 1964, Nottingham, England)

tehillim, 2018

Porcelain tiles with gold leaf and alabaster blocks in vitrines of aluminum and plexiglass

The Jewish Museum, New York, Purchase: Mildred Weissman Estate Fund, 2024-74.1-11

As a major component of Edmund de Waal's 2019 Venice Biennale installation, *tehillim* (Psalms) was first placed on the threshold of the Scuola Canton, one of the five historic synagogues in the Venetian ghetto. In the ghetto, established in 1516, Jews were banned from many professions, they had to wear discriminatory badges, and their synagogues could not incorporate luxury materials such as gold—materials the artist intentionally used in *tehillim*.

Sacred to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the Psalms have carried special meaning for de Waal since childhood as "songs and poems of exile." He views his father's lifelong engagement with these biblical texts as "part of the complex archaeology of [my] Jewish and Christian lineage." The artist keeps "returning to the Psalms as the core expressions of loss and renewal, of anger, despair and joy" and "the ever-present absence of Jerusalem."

208

Double cup inscribed with the names of the Three Kings, 1325–49

Central Europe (now Germany or Czech Republic)
Silver, gilt silver, and enamel

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 1983

The enigmatic coat of arms on this drinking vessel provides a possible Jewish connection: three-pointed hats (*Judenhüte*)—mandatory headgear for Jews—correspond to the emblem of a Jewish family from Zurich. The vessel bears the names "Caspar/Melchior/Waltazar," known as the Three Kings, or Magi, who, according to the Gospel of Matthew, offered gifts to the infant Christ. As their remains are believed to be housed in Cologne Cathedral, the kings were honored with special devotion and toasts in the Germanic Lands. Christian and Jewish physicians also invoked their names for healing and good health. The vessel may have been a gift from a Jew to a Christian, a pledge for an unpaid loan to a Jewish moneylender who added his coat of arms or owned by a Jewish convert to Christianity.

Medieval Objects from the Lingenfeld Treasure

Beaker, 1300–48

Speyer (now in Germany)
Silver and gilt silver

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 2025

Ring brooch, c. 1340–48

Middle Rhineland (now in Germany)
Gold, spinels, and sapphires

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 2006

Beaker, c. 1340–48

Speyer (now in Germany)
Parcel-gilt silver

Historisches Museum der Pfalz Speyer

Likely buried during the Black Death, a devastating plague, these objects were found on a farm near Lingenfeld, Germany, placed inside a terracotta vessel alongside silver rings and coins dating to the 1340s. Although the contents of the Lingenfeld Treasure are largely secular, similar hoards were hidden across Europe by Jewish families and merchants fleeing either the plague or its surrounding anti-Jewish violence. Octagonal beakers like these could have served as kiddush cups for the Sabbath and festivals, as attested by fourteenth- and fifteenth-century depictions of the Passover meal (Seder) in Haggadot, the holiday's ritual texts.

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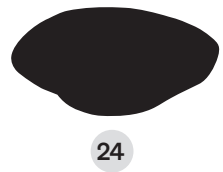

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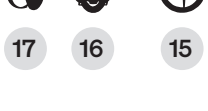
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22 AND 23

Garment clasps in the shape of an eagle, late thirteenth–early fourteenth century
Gilt silver and glass

24

Shell bowl, 1325–48
Parcel-gilt silver

25

Hans Jacob Wild II (1650–1733, master in 1679)
Double marriage cup, c. 1650–60
Augsburg (now in Germany)
Engraved, repoussé, and parcel-gilt silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 2587a-b
Provenance: unknown owner; acquired by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1950

Double cups were often used for special toasts during the Middle Ages. The shape lent itself to use during Jewish wedding ceremonies as a different cup is required for each of the two portions of the ritual—the betrothal and the marriage. Originally the betrothal occurred a year before the marriage, but by the twelfth century the two stages took place on the wedding day. Given that medieval Jewish life was transient due to frequent persecutions and expulsions, few early Jewish ritual objects survive. This seventeenth-century Jewish double marriage cup preserves the form of those from the Middle Ages.

PLEASE RETURN TO THE BOX

1 TO 6

Moniles

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

The Latin term for a necklace, monile, also refers to an amuletlike reliquary meant to be worn on the chest, probably by a member of the clergy. Usually round in format and intricately crafted, these objects have an opening on one side for viewing the relics, and the other side usually features depictions of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and saints. These ceremonial items touch the body, so they are often decorated with scenes related to intimate or intense personal devotion.

1

Monile, c. 1500
Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)
Partly gilt silver, imitation gemstones, and rock crystal
Exhibition entrance side: relics of Saints Catherine, Dorothea, Helen, and Margaret
Exhibition interior side: depiction of Canon Thomas kneeling before Saint Catherine

2

Monile, 1480–1500
Prague
Gilt silver, enamel on copper, glass, and polished carnelian plate
Exhibition entrance side: relics of Saints Cassius of Bonn, Constance, and Paulinus of Trier
Exhibition interior side: carnelian plate with floral decoration

3

Monile, 1490–1500
Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)
Gilt silver and Bohemian garnets
Exhibition entrance side: depiction of Saint Catherine after engraving by Master E. S. (German, active c. 1450–67)
Exhibition interior side: relics of Saints Benedict (one of the Five Holy Brothers), Justina, and Kilian

4

Monile, c. 1500 (monile), c. 1100 or 1300–1400 (cameo)
Prague (monile), Byzantium or Southern Italy (cameo)
Gilt silver and crystal
Exhibition entrance side: relics of the patron saints of Bohemia
Exhibition interior side: Byzantine cameo and depictions of Christ, the Virgin, saints, and the Veil of Veronica

5

Monile, c. 1500
Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)
Gilt silver and garnets
Exhibition entrance side: Virgin and Child, with Virgin holding apple as “the new Eve,” thought to redeem the original sin in the Genesis story of the Hebrew Bible
Exhibition interior side: relic of Saint Apollinaris

6

Monile, after 1504
Prague
Gilt silver, mother-of-pearl, crystal, gemstones, and translucent enamel
Exhibition entrance side: depiction of the Death of the Virgin
Exhibition interior side: relic of Saint Bartholomew and heavily abraded depictions of Christ, the Evangelists, and a donor

7

Sabbath and festival lamp, fourteenth century

Holy Roman Empire
Cast and engraved bronze

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert A. List, JM 200-67

Provenance: said to have been found in Dentz (Rhineland, Germany), unknown date; Siegfried S. Strauss (1893–1969), Brooklyn, New York, and later Los Angeles; purchased by Vera List, New York for the Jewish Museum, 1967

Star-shaped lamps were used for illumination in medieval domestic settings and also in a Jewish ritual context for the Sabbath and festivals. Although it fell into disuse in Christian settings by the sixteenth century, Jews retained the form, and this type of lamp came to be known as *Judenstern*, or "Jewish star."

8

Aquamanile (handwashing vessel), late twelfth century with later inscription

Northern Germany
Cast and engraved copper alloy

The Jewish Museum, New York, Purchase: Gift of The Kagan-Katz-Kivel Families, by exchange; Traditional Judaica Acquisitions Committee and Endowment Interest Funds; Henry and Lucy Moses Fund; Henry Herzog Family and Friends Fund in memory of Ruth Herzog; Helen and Jack Cytryn Fund; and Traditional Judaica Acquisitions Fund, 2013-16

Provenance: unknown owner; M. Eckstein, London; Peter and his son Michael Ehrenthal (the owners of Moriah Gallery, New York), 1970s; Leopold and Ruth Blumka, New York; Michael and Judy Steinhardt, 1996; purchased by the Jewish Museum from Sotheby's, New York, 2013

Beginning in the twelfth century, fanciful pitchers in animal and human form came into use for handwashing rituals in churches, and synagogues, and affluent homes. A lion vessel would have carried a different meaning in each context—as the emblem of the Tribe of Judah, as an allegory of Christ, or as a symbol of bravery. Though many medieval examples still exist, this one is rare due to a later Hebrew inscription on one side that indicates its donation, likely to a synagogue, by Berekhiah Segal. The name "Segal" identifies the donor as a descendant of the Levites, who traditionally aid descendants of priests (Kohanim) in ritually purifying (washing) their hands before they recite a blessing.

206 AD 902

9 TO 18

Medieval Treasure found in Weißenfels (now in Germany)

Kulturstiftung Sachsen-Anhalt, Kunstmuseum Moritzberg Halle (Saale), Germany

Discovered in 1826, the Weißenfels Treasure was one of the earliest finds of Jewish-owned objects buried during the Middle Ages. Rings from the group include a man's engagement band with a sapphire, another with a Prague groschen coin—the currency Wenceslas II of Bohemia (1278–1305) introduced in 1300—and a rare medieval Jewish wedding ring. The latter, which is on view in this exhibition, clearly identifies this hoard as Jewish-owned. Also found, along with thousands of coins, were brooches and belt buckles, which lovers exchanged to express affection or pledge betrothal.

9

Belt and buckle, c. 1300–1348
Cast and soldered silver

10

Ring, 1300–1325
Silver and sapphire

11

Flower-decorated fragment, 1300–1325
Cast, possibly embossed, and cut silver sheet

12

Fragment with a depiction of a mythical creature, 1300–1325
Engraved and cut silver sheet

13

Flower-decorated fragment, 1300–1325
Embossed and cut silver sheet

14

Decorative star, 1300–1325
Embossed and cut silver sheet

15

Ring clasp, 1300–1325
Silver

16

Belt buckle with a pair of lovers, c. 1300–1325
Cast and parcel-gilt silver

17

Ring with a coin, c. 1300–1348
Cast silver and silver coin (Prague groschen of Wenceslas II, king of Bohemia)

18

Animal-shaped fragment, c. 1300–1325
Silver sheet

19 TO 24

Objects from the Medieval Treasure found in Erfurt (now in Germany)

Thüringer Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie, Erfurt, Germany

These objects were discovered in 1998 in the cellar wall of a medieval house in Erfurt during an archaeological excavation. The treasure contains vessels, rings and other jewelry, garment clasps in animal and vegetal forms, and thousands of coins. Hidden in the 1340s by a Jewish owner, the find also includes an Ashkenazi (Eastern and Central European) wedding ring decorated with a Gothic building and engraved with the Hebrew phrase "Mazal Tov" (good luck), a greeting common at weddings and other milestone celebrations in Jewish life. A similar Jewish wedding ring, on view in this exhibition, was found in the hoard from Weißenfels (now in Germany). The owner of the Erfurt Treasure likely perished in the 1349 massacre, in which hundreds of members of the Erfurt Jewish community, blamed for the spreading of the Black Death, were killed, and the survivors were expelled.

19

Garment clasp in the shape of a lion, late thirteenth–early fourteenth century
Gilt silver

20

Garment clasp in the shape of a cat, late thirteenth–early fourteenth century
Silver

21

Garment clasp in the shape of leaves, late thirteenth–early fourteenth century
Gilt silver

[VITRINE AT CENTER OF GALLERY—M204.02]
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[HORIZONTAL FORMAT]
[TEAL]

Edmund de Waal (born in 1964, Nottingham, England)
Maiko Tsutsumi (born in 1971, Japan)
Meissen Porcelain Manufactory (founded in 1710, Germany)

Von Klemperer Plate, XII, c. 1760–65; kintsugi, 2019

Porcelain with gold lacquer repair (*kintsugi*)

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Edmund de Waal, 2024-23

This plate is part of a dinner service, one of eighteen that belonged to the German Jewish banker and public servant Gustav von Klemperer. In 1938 the set was seized by the Nazis and damaged. The shattered pieces were later restituted to his rightful heirs, from whom de Waal purchased them at auction. Edmund de Waal, an artist and writer, wanted to mend the porcelain without occluding its history. He commissioned Maiko Tsutsumi, a scholar and expert craftsperson, to reassemble the plate using the *kintsugi* technique—a centuries-old Japanese art form that reconstitutes broken ceramics using lacquer and sometimes powdered gold. Edmund de Waal regards *kintsugi* as a way of recording loss.

Floor tile with a deer design from the Jewish Quarter, Cologne, before 1349

Cologne (now in Germany)

Ceramic

Romano-Germanic Museum of the City of Cologne

Excavated from Cologne's medieval Jewish Quarter, this tile bears a leaping deer, a motif shared by Jewish and Christian buildings throughout the medieval Rhineland. The object was found alongside fragments of the synagogue—destroyed in 1349—which are on display in the previous gallery.

Wedding ring from the Weißenfels Treasure, early fourteenth century

Silver and parcel-gilt silver

Kulturstiftung Sachsen-Anhalt, Kunstmuseum Moritzburg Halle (Saale), Germany

This rare medieval Jewish wedding ring was part of the Weißenfels Treasure, buried during the Black Death. Only very few elaborate rings with house-shaped bezels are known, also discovered in hidden hoards. This example bears the Hebrew inscription *mazal tov* (“good wishes”), clearly signaling its Jewish ownership. Its architectural bezel may evoke the couple’s future home and the Temple in Jerusalem, a motif that inspired Jewish marriage rings for centuries.

207

PATRONAGE AND POWER: CHARLES IV AND ST. VITUS CATHEDRAL

The objects in this gallery are primarily reliquaries—works of ritual art made to contain and display relics. Relics are physical remains or belongings associated with Christian saints and figures, including bones, textiles, or objects that they used or owned. In the Middle Ages, relics anchored religious practice in Christianity and were understood as tangible links to sacred history. For Charles IV (r. 1346–1378), the acquisition of important relics for St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague became paramount in his quest to transform the city into the sacred capital of the Holy Roman Empire. The cathedral, part of the castle complex and historically associated with the tomb of Saint Wenceslas, the patron saint of Bohemia, became one of the main repositories for relics in Central Europe. The emperor greatly expanded the treasury's already significant holdings, centralizing religious and political power to reinforce his dynastic authority. Charles IV also established treasuries of reliquaries and imperial regalia at Karlštejn Castle near Prague.

The display of relics during Mass, public ceremonies, and processions became an integral aspect of medieval Christian worship following the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which formalized transubstantiation. This doctrine affirmed that the consecrated wafer and wine used during Mass, known as the Eucharist (the Christian rite commemorating the Last Supper), became the body and blood of Christ. The increasing centrality of the Eucharist in worship resulted in new emphasis on sight in devotional practice. Reliquaries, in turn, were designed to make relics more visible, incorporating precious and translucent materials such as rock crystal, long associated with Byzantine and Islamic luxury arts that made their way to Christian Europe.

While Charles IV assembled relics to elevate Prague into the "New Jerusalem," Jewish communities in parts of his empire faced persecution and expulsion, and in some cases their objects survived only through burial and later recovery, as seen in the previous gallery.

Reliquary of Saints Nicasius, Remigius, and Urasius, 1375–1400

Prague

Gilt silver, rock crystal, and enamel

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Reliquary of Saint Victorinus, 1350–1400 (rock-crystal ball), fifteenth century (base), seventeenth–eighteenth century (textiles)

Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)
Gilt copper, gilt silver, rock crystal, and cotton rep and threads

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Among the many relics Emperor Charles IV brought to Prague were the remains of Saint Victorinus of Pettau, an early Christian bishop and one of the first commentators on the Gospel of John. In 1357 Charles IV transferred Victorinus's remains to the city, from which individual relics were later removed and displayed in specially made reliquaries such as this one. A precisely cut rock-crystal sphere, held within a delicate gilt-metal framework, makes visible the relics inside. Its innovative form reflects the artistic ambition of Prague goldsmiths working during Charles IV's reign.

Cylindrical reliquary with pointed cover, 1350–1400

Prague

Gilt silver, rock crystal, and mother-of-pearl

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This reliquary is believed to contain relics of Saints Adauctus, Andrew, Barbara, Catherine, Cecilia, Clare, Dorothea, Dominic, Felix, George, Lupus, Margaret, Mary Magdalene, Nicholas, Ursula, and others, and of the scourge used in the Flagellation of Christ.

Letter from Charles IV informing Arnošt of Pardubice, archbishop of Prague, and the Metropolitan Chapter that he has acquired remains of Saint Vitus at the Monastery of Saint Martin in Pavia and will send them to St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague, January 22, 1355

Pisa

Facsimile; parchment, ink, and seal fragments (original)

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Inventory of the treasury of St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague, mid-August–October 5, 1355

Prague

Ink on parchment

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This inventory records the dramatic expansion of the treasury of St. Vitus Cathedral under Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV. Compiled after Charles IV's coronation journey to Rome, the inventory documents more than eighty relics acquired between autumn 1354 and summer 1355, many obtained during his travels in Italy. The list, sorted by reliquary type and the importance of the contents, reveals the emperor's ambition to transform the treasury into a magnificent collection of relics.

The Gospel of Saint Mark, sixth century, with an autograph note by Charles IV, October 31, 1354

Aquileia (now in Italy) (manuscript), Prague (inscription and seal)
Facsimile; ink on parchment with sealing wax (original)

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

A fragment of the Gospel of Mark believed to be from the original penned by the Evangelist was preserved as a precious relic at the tomb of Saint Wenceslas in the cathedral's chapel devoted to him. Each Easter, the relic was carried through the streets of Prague in a public procession. The autograph note added to the fragment is in Charles IV's handwriting. The emperor's decision to inscribe the Gospel reflects his desire to touch relics, even if such action was not permitted.

Communion chalice for the sick, fourth century (cup), 1350 (base)

Eastern Mediterranean (cup), Prague (base)
Sardonyx (agate), gilt silver, and enamel

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This rare chalice combines an ancient sardonyx stone cup with a richly decorated silver-gilt mount made in Prague. The translucent vessel was transformed into a Christian liturgical object, its reddish hue associated in the Middle Ages with the blood of Christ and martyrs. An inscription on its base, dated to 1350, identifies Charles IV as the donor of the chalice to St. Vitus Cathedral and states that the vessel was intended “for the use of the sick.”

Reliquary casket of Saint Nicholas, c. 1230 (casket), 1250–75 (base)

Upper Rhine (now in Germany) (casket), Prague (base)

Gilt silver, milky quartz, niello, gemstones, and imitation glass

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This reliquary is believed to preserve a finger bone of Saint Nicholas, one of the most revered saints of the Middle Ages. The relic likely reached Prague from Bari (now in Italy), where merchants had brought Saint Nicholas's remains in 1087 after taking them from Myra (now in Turkey), a move that helped make his cult widely popular. In 1353 Emperor Charles IV, who held the saint in high esteem, ordered the finger bone divided to create additional relics. According to tradition, the relic miraculously bled during the ceremony, an event commemorated by two small pieces of red fabric preserved inside the casket.

Embriachi Workshop

Casket with relics of Saint Sigismund, before 1376

Florence

Horse bone over a limewood core with ivory inlay and metal passe-partout

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Originally made as a secular luxury object, this casket was later acquired by Charles IV to house relics of Saint Sigismund, the Burgundian king whom the emperor elevated as a patron saint of Bohemia. Its carved bone plaques depict banquets, hunting, and courtly romance rather than religious subjects, demonstrating how secular objects could be adapted for sacred purposes. The emperor's devotion to the saint was such that he named his younger son Sigismund.

Golden cross with a relic of Christ's loincloth, donated by Pope Urban V, 1369 (cross), 1509 (base)

Avignon (now in France) (cross), Prague (base)
Gold, rock crystal, sapphires, spinels, gilt silver, glass, and niello

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

A rock crystal–covered compartment at the center of this jeweled golden cross contains a textile relic identified by an inscription as a fragment of Christ's bloodstained loincloth. The cross's detailed decoration reveals the relic's journey to Prague: on the lower arm, Pope Urban V presents the relic to Charles IV, who wears his imperial crown and cloak adorned with eagles. The scene commemorates the pontiff's gift of important relics to the emperor during his 1368 visit to Rome. His heir, Wenceslas, and members of the papal court witness the scene. Through the imagery, this cross containing a holy relic also becomes a record of political alliance between Church and empire.

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Table reliquary with a sliding lid, fourteenth century

Prague

Gilt silver

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This silver box represents the simplest form of a reliquary: a locked container with rows of small compartments inside, each designed to hold an individual relic. In the early modern period, relics were typically wrapped in red cloth and labeled with small tags called “authentics,” which were inscribed with red lettering to identify their contents. An inscription indicates that this box was one of the reliquaries once kept at the imperial castle at Karlštejn, near Prague.

Wenceslas of Budweis

Reliquary bust of Saint Vitus, 1486

Prague

Gilt silver, crystal, glass, and doublets

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Saint Vitus was one of Bohemia's patron saints, and the cathedral that bears his name was built to safeguard his relics. Shaped as the head and upper body of Saint Vitus, this bust—a sculpted container in the likeness of the saint—is believed to enshrine the relics of the early Christian martyr. The saint's youthful face and delicately curled hair evoke Prague's "Beautiful Style"—a courtly mode of sculpture and painting marked by soft, flowing drapery and gentle, idealized features—that developed around 1400 in the artistic milieu Charles IV fostered.

Dormition of the Virgin, c. 1340–45

Prague

Tempera and gold on board

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Francis Warden Fund, and funds by exchange from the Seth K. Sweetser Fund, The Henry C. and Martha B. Angell Collection, Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, Gift of Martin Brimmer, and gift of Reverend and Mrs. Frederick Frothingham

A product of the refined artistic style developed under Charles IV, this scene depicts the death of the Virgin, or Dormition, set in an elaborate Gothic interior. Haloed Mary reclines, surrounded by the Apostles, who gaze mournfully at her as one of them rings a bell, announcing the moment of her death. Christ holds a small, crowned figure in a white robe: a representation of the Virgin's pure soul leaving her earthly body.

The Adoration of the Magi and the Dormition of the Virgin, c. 1355–60

Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)

Tempera and gold on linen-covered panel

The Morgan Library and Museum, Purchased by J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1931

This two-panel painting, or diptych, features moments in the life of the Virgin Mary. At left the Three Kings, or Magi, who according to the Gospel of Matthew were led by a star to the newly born Christ, present their gifts to the infant as he sits on Mary's lap. At right the Apostles gather around the Virgin as she lies on her deathbed . Both scenes situate the narrative within Charles IV's reign. The bearded Magus standing at center resembles depictions of the emperor at that time and wears a red cloak with the imperial eagle. Saint Peter, considered to be the first pope, appears beside the dead Virgin, wearing the three-layered tiara worn by popes in the fourteenth century.

Crystal jug with part of the relic of the cloth from the Last Supper, 1300–1350 (jug), c. 1350 (mounts)

Paris (jug), Prague (mounts)
Rock crystal, gilt silver, gemstones, pearls, and linen

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Prague under Charles IV was a main center of spiritual life and the affluent imperial capital. This unique reliquary brings out both these aspects. The container is believed to hold a fragment of the tablecloth used at the Last Supper, which was one of the most important relics in the treasury. At the Emperor's request to Pope Clement VI, when the relic was first shown at St. Vitus Cathedral in 1350, all who viewed it received an indulgence—a remission of temporal punishment for sins in Purgatory. Charles IV placed the relic in a luxurious Parisian rock crystal jug that would have adorned the table of a royal feast, linking a symbol of courtly dining culture with Christ's final meal.

Reliquary chasse, c. 1200

Limoges (now in France)
Gilt copper and enamel on wood core

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Although this object became part of the St. Vitus Cathedral treasury after the reign of Charles IV, its French style would have been familiar to the emperor (as evidenced by the miniature ivory Virgin and Child on view nearby, which he obtained). Raised at the French royal court, Charles IV would have encountered the art and architecture of France's great Gothic churches, experiences that ultimately shaped his vision for the expansion of St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague. The chasse is thought to contain relics of Saint Conrad of Constance, Saint Leonard of Noblac, and the Ten Thousand Martyrs.

Reliquary composed of two bowls with lid for the veil of the Virgin Mary, 1300–1350 (bowl), 1350–75 (mounts)

Paris or Venice (bowls), Bohemia (mounts)

Rock crystal and engraved and gilt silver

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Portable altar of the Virgin Mary and the Apostles with Saints, 1399

Prague

Gilt silver, jasper, and rock crystal

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

According to the Latin inscription along the border, this object was consecrated as a portable altar in honor of the Virgin Mary, allowing Mass to be performed outside a church. Consecration required both an altar stone and enclosed relics. The object on view here has a stone underside that could rest directly on a table, while a rock-crystal pane above reveals the relics without allowing direct access. The altar no longer contains relics of the Virgin but still holds those of the Apostles. The symbols of the Four Evangelists are engraved at each corner, linking the object to the four Gospels, the foundational texts of Christianity.

Reliquary containing part of the table used for the Last Supper, c. 1354

Prague

Gilt silver and wood panel

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This reliquary in the shape of a miniature tabletop contains a relic believed to have come from the table used at the Last Supper. The original table no longer exists, but its associated relics have great significance due to their connection to the moment during the Last Supper when Jesus instituted the Eucharist. According to this doctrine, the consecrated wafer and wine used during Mass become the body and blood of Christ. Charles IV acquired this relic in 1353 and placed it in the St. Vitus Cathedral treasury the following year.

The fortunes of St. Vitus Cathedral's treasury changed dramatically during the Hussite Wars (1419–35), which were fought in Central Europe between the Catholic Church and the followers of Jan Hus, who led a movement that preceded the Protestant Reformation. In July 1420 Sigismund, king of the Romans and Hungary, sold rare relics from the cathedral to finance his fight against the Hussites. The act effectively ended the treasury's medieval golden age. The objects that survived the wars were often modified and embellished over the following centuries.

ABOVE

Vera icon with the Bohemian patron saints on the frame, 1430–40

Prague

Tempera and gold on canvas mounted on wood

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This image is an example of a vera icon (true image), believed to bear a miraculous likeness of Christ. The carefully rendered face has a direct and penetrating gaze intended to inspire contemplation and reverence. A distinctive Bohemian feature is the frame with elaborate depictions of patron saints of the country. These figures link the image of Christ to the protection of the Bohemian realm, indicating a renewed affirmation of the authority of the Catholic Church, which had been threatened during the Hussite Wars (1419–35). The painting was created in Prague in the 1430s during the reign of King Sigismund, a son of Emperor Charles IV.

Box for a relic of the Sudarium of Christ, fourteenth century, with 1780 additions

Probably Mainz (now in Germany)
Silver on wood core with textile

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This reliquary was once thought to house a fragment of the Sudarium, the cloth believed to have covered Christ's face after the Crucifixion. A 1387 inventory of the St. Vitus Cathedral treasury describes a richly decorated container for the relic with individual ornamental panels. Today only the decorative borders survive, along with an enameled inscription identifying the relic as a gift from Emperor Charlemagne (747/48–814), who revived the Roman imperial tradition in the West. The Sudarium held particular significance for Charles IV both as a relic of Christ and as a link to his imperial predecessor. At the age of seven, young Wenceslas was renamed Charles by his godfather, the king of France, symbolically tying the heir to the throne of Bohemia to Charlemagne's legacy.

ABOVE

Attributed to Workshop of Master Theodoric

Madonna Ara Coeli on a gold background, c. 1365 (icon), 1703 (frame)

Prague

Tempera on paper, gilt tin on a wood core, gilt copper, and silver

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

In 1368 Charles IV visited Rome, returning to Prague with a copy of the Madonna Ara Coeli, a Byzantine-inspired icon of the blessing Virgin Mary in a blue robe. Drops of red paint were later added across the Virgin's face and garment—possibly inspired by the relic procured by Charles and believed to be of the Virgin Mary's bloodstained veil—transforming the Roman image into a Bohemian "icon." The painting on view, attributed to Master Theodoric's workshop at Charles IV's court, is one of several Prague versions created from the Roman model. Devotional images connected to ancient prototypes were often copied, creating a succession of likenesses linking back to the Virgin's portrait, traditionally thought to have been painted by Saint Luke the Evangelist, and by extension to the Virgin herself.

Virgin and Child, c. 1320, with later base

Paris or Normandy (now in France)

Ivory, gilt silver, and rock crystal

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Finger reliquary, c. 1400

Prague

Gilt copper, rock crystal, and glass

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

In 1357 Charles IV obtained a hand relic of Saint Quentin from Reims, where the saint was particularly venerated. Part of this relic may be housed in this container with relics of other saints, including those of the Bohemian patrons Adalbert, Ludmila, Sigismund, Vitus, and Wenceslas.

Reliquary incorporating a monile with relics of Saints Matthew and Matthias and engraved with the Coronation of the Virgin Mary, fourteenth century (reliquary), before 1465 (monile)

Prague

Parcel-gilt silver, rock crystal, Bohemian garnets (graduated), and remnants of sealing wax

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

A monile is an amuletlike reliquary meant to be worn on the chest probably by a member of the clergy. At times the objects were incorporated into larger reliquaries, as seen here. The scene of the Coronation of the Virgin Mary on the back was inspired by a work by the prominent German engraver Master E. S. (active circa 1450–67), whose religious imagery became widely disseminated and inspired ritual objects like this one.

Box containing a relic of the blood-stained veil of Mary, before 1354

Prague

Gilt silver, rock crystal, sealing wax, silk, and linen

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Charles IV acquired a fragment believed to come from the veil of the Virgin Mary in Trier in 1354. The relic was divided into two portions: One was placed in the rock crystal bowl on view nearby, and the other—believed to be stained with blood from Christ's Crucifixion—was sealed within this box. This bloodstained veil may have inspired court painters to depict Mary's icons with drops of red across her face and garment, as seen in the painting nearby. The box is sealed with wax bearing an image of the she-wolf, a symbol of Rome and Charles IV's imperial ambitions.

Ottavio (1567–1624) or Dionysio Miseroni (1607–1661) and workshop

Monstrance, c. 1620 or 1640

Prague

Gold, coral agate, herbal agate, and rock crystal partially replaced by glass

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

The Miseroni family, working for the imperial court in Prague, transformed hardstones into some of the most extraordinary luxury objects of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This sun monstrance uses translucent stone and radiating rock crystal rays to bathe the consecrated Host in a luminous glow, heightening its visual impact during Mass. Works such as this one embody the fanciful Mannerist taste cultivated at the court of Emperor Rudolf II. Natural wonders, precious stones, and technical ingenuity were prized as expressions of artistic mastery and sacred splendor.

Chalice for Mass, fifteenth century

Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)
Gilt silver, filigreed enamel, rock crystal, amethysts, chrysoprases, and garnets

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This chalice was made for the celebration of the Eucharist at one of the altars in St. Vitus Cathedral. The Eucharist is a central part of Christian liturgy in which bread and wine become consecrated. Christians take the body of Christ in the form of bread or a wafer in commemoration of the Last Supper and Christ's death. This cup was found intact in 1871 during excavations for the expansion of the cathedral.

Secular goblet with cupids, repurposed for sacred use, early seventeenth century

Prague

Gilt silver

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

ABOVE

Master Martin

Reliquary tablet of the diocesan administrator Hanuš of Kolowrat, 1465

Prague

Parcel-gilt silver on pine panel with amethysts, chalcedony, agates, smoky topazes, chrysoprases, lapis lazuli, freshwater pearls, imitation glass, filigreed silver, mother-of-pearl, enamel, silk, gold, pearls, and wire

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This reliquary was commissioned by the Bohemian nobleman Hanuš of Kolowrat in 1465, the year his wife died and shortly before he entered the priesthood. A relic believed to be of the True Cross occupies the center and is surrounded by other relics, including those of the patron saints of Bohemia and of the True Cross. Figures of the Four Evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—and Bohemia's patron saints stand within niches around the perimeter. Two mother-of-pearl medallions show a twelve-year-old Christ debating with the rabbis at the ancient Temple in Jerusalem and the martyrdom of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. Created during a period of religious conflict, the reliquary affirmed its donor's Catholic faith and loyalty to the Bohemian kingdom.

Front cover of the Prague Gospel Book with a panel from a Roman consular diptych (400–450), book cover (tenth century), diptych panel (400–450), with additional metalwork (after 1450)

Roman Empire (diptych); Corvey, Lower Saxony (now Germany) (diptych panel refashioning); Prague (additional metalwork)
Ivory, gilt copper, goldsmith settings for stones, rock crystal, chrysoprases, onyxes, amethysts, and chalcedony

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This extraordinary book cover preserves nearly a thousand years of history. At its center is a fifth-century Roman ivory, originally carved for a secular consular diptych (a two-panel work) and later transformed into an image of Saint Peter by adding a halo and reshaping the consul's scepter into the apostle's key. The ivory was mounted on a luxurious cover of an important Gospel book that reached Prague by the early eleventh century and became one of St. Vitus Cathedral's greatest treasures. After the original cover was damaged during the Hussite Wars, Bohemian goldsmiths refashioned it with gilt copper, and gemstones, adding four rock-crystal settings containing relics to create the striking composite seen today.

Fragments of altar decorations with pearl embroidery, c. 1380–1410, with later modifications

Italy or Germany (supporting fabric), Prague (embroidery)

Silk, linen, silk satin, pearls, rubies, almandines, amethysts, doublets, glass, silver-bullion wire, silver and gilt sequins, gold foil, gilt copper, and multicolored silk thread

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Exquisitely embroidered with precious stones and thousands of tiny pearls, these textile fragments were likely part of altar hangings made for St. Vitus Cathedral. Their luxurious materials signal a commission of the highest prestige, while the figures of Christ, the Virgin, Saints Wenceslas and Vitus, and others emphasize the importance of Bohemia's patron saints. The flowing drapery, graceful proportions, and elegant poses reflect the "Beautiful Style" that flourished in Prague around 1400 under King Wenceslas IV.

Reliquary bust of Saint Adalbert, late fifteenth century

Prague

Parcel-gilt silver, almandine, amethysts, chrysoprase, citrine, chalcedony, carnelian, malachite, lapis lazuli, and emerald

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Striking reliquary busts, carved in precious metal and nearly life-size, made the saints seem vividly present. In addition to containing relics, each sculpture displays the saint's identity and status. Adalbert (c. 956–997) is rendered as a missionary and the aged bishop of Prague. The bust of Wenceslas conversely depicts Bohemia's patron saint as a youthful warrior prince. Rock-crystal windows allowed worshippers to glimpse the relics within, while jeweled surfaces proclaimed their sacred importance. Monumental reliquaries played central roles in ceremonies at Prague Castle, where they were carried in processions, displayed on feast days, and honored with crowns and other regalia. Together they embodied the dynastic and heavenly protectors of the Bohemian kingdom.

Coins from the Medieval Treasure found in Środa Śląska (now in Poland)

The National Museum in Wrocław, Poland

Florin of John of Luxembourg, 1310–46

Prague and Luxembourg
Gold

Prague groschens from the reign of John of Luxembourg, 1310–46

Kutná Hora (now in Czech Republic)
Silver

The National Museum in Wrocław

Groschens from the reign of Charles IV, 1346–78

Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)
Silver

Florin of Wenceslas I, duke of Legnica, 1345–64

Legnica, Lower Silesia (now in Poland)
Gold

Florin of Albert II Habsburg, duke of Austria, 1330–58

Judenberg (now in Austria)
Gold

Florins of Louis I the Great, king of Hungary, 1342–82

Buda (now in Hungary)
Gold

Zecchino of Francesco Dandolo, doge of Venice, 1329–39

Venice
Gold

Gold florin of the city of Florence, 1334

Florence
Gold

Jewelry from the Medieval Treasure Found in Środa Śląska (now in Poland)

The National Museum in Wrocław, Poland

Decorative tape (four fragments), thirteenth–fourteenth century

Prague

Gold

Breastpin with a bird figure, thirteenth century

Balkans

Gold

Ring, 1300–1325

Central Europe

Gold and sapphire

Signet ring with a moon and star, thirteenth–fourteenth century

Central Europe

Gold

Ring with a pearl, c. 1250

Central Europe

Gold, pearl, and garnet

Środa Śląska Treasure

The National Museum in Wrocław, Poland

This remarkable hoard, now known as the Środa Śląska Treasure, was likely connected to a 1348 loan King Charles IV obtained from a Jewish financier named Muscho who lived in the Silesian territory of Środa Śląska (in present-day Poland). Barred from most professions except moneylending, Jews were tied to royal authority through credit and pledge arrangements. At the time, Charles IV was seeking to consolidate power and needed funds for his campaign to become Holy Roman emperor. He probably used this hoard as a loan pledge. The treasure includes items ranging from jewelry that originated in Sicily and the Balkans to fourteenth-century gold coins from Venice, Florence, and Austria, and silver ones minted near Prague under the emperor and his father, John of Luxembourg. Buried in the fourteenth century during the Black Death, a deadly pandemic that was blamed on Jews, the hoard resurfaced in the 1980s during the demolition of homes that once belonged to medieval Jewish residents.

ABOVE

So-called chasuble and stole of Saint Wenceslas, 1250–1350 (fabric), assembled in the fifteenth century, with later additions

Egypt or Al-Andalus (now in Spain) (fabric), Prague (tailoring)
Lampas silk and gilt threads with modern silk lining

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Wenceslas, duke of Bohemia, was head of the Přemyslid house, the first Czech royal dynasty, from which Charles IV stemmed. He was murdered by his brother around 935 and swiftly venerated as a martyr and saint. Over time, he became an enduring symbol of Bohemian statehood and the patron of St. Vitus Cathedral. The chasuble and stole, woven from luxury silks imported from the Islamic world, were made after Wenceslas's death and were used in the chapel dedicated to him at the cathedral rather than by the saint during his lifetime. On view nearby are reliquaries that preserve the physical memory of the saint across centuries of veneration at St. Vitus Cathedral.

Woman's crown the Medieval Treasure Found in Środa Śląska (now in Poland), early fourteenth century

Paris or Sicily

Gold, pearl, glass, enamel, sapphire, garnet, aquamarine, emerald, spinel, and tektite

The National Museum in Wrocław, Poland

This delicate gold crown is the most celebrated object from the Środa Śląska Treasure. The crown has been associated with Blanche of Valois, the first wife of Emperor Charles IV. Whether or not the crown belonged to Blanche, the object reflects the wealth and courtly culture of Charles IV's reign as expressions of power and rank.

Jewelry from the Medieval Treasure Found in Środa Śląska (now in Poland)

The National Museum in Wrocław, Poland

Pendants, twelfth–thirteenth century

Eastern Mediterranean and Sicily (enamel)
Gold, sapphire, citrine, garnet, rhodolite, pyrope, pearl, and enamel

Brooch with a cameo, 1240 (cameo), 1250–75 (brooch)

Sicily
Gold, garnet, pearl, emerald, and chalcedony

Reliquary of Saint Wenceslas, late fourteenth century

Prague

Gilt silver and rock crystal

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Reliquary chest from the tomb of Saint Wenceslas, 1570–after 1600

Prague

Eglomise painting on glass with wood and metal

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This painted-glass reliquary chest was created centuries after the death of Saint Wenceslas to hold his relics when they were reburied in 1671. Its unusual decoration combines Christian scenes, including the Annunciation to Mary of Christ's birth and the Wedding at Cana—one of Christ's miracles—with mythical creatures and portraitlike busts set within Renaissance wreaths. These images reflect the artistic style of the Prague court of Emperor Rudolf II rather than the medieval world of the saint. Discovered when the tomb was opened in 1911, the chest reveals how the veneration of Saint Wenceslas evolved through time.

Bust of Saint Ludmila, shortly after 1300

Prague

Gilt silver, rock crystal, glass, and amethysts with wood core

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Arm reliquary of Saint Ludmila, c. 1302

Prague

Gilt silver, amethysts, glass, sapphires, almandine, emerald, jasper, chalcedony, quartz, dendritic agate, carnelian agate, and bezoar stone

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Saint Ludmila (c. 860–921) was the grandmother of Saint Wenceslas and an early Christian ruler of Bohemia. These reliquaries take the shape of the body parts they were believed to contain, making the saint's presence visible through sculptural form. Saint Ludmila appears as the revered Christian matriarch of Prague, reflecting the enduring importance of the Přemyslid dynasty—the earliest Czech royal house, from which Charles IV stemmed—in shaping Bohemian religious identity.

Arm reliquary of Saint Wenceslas, before 1460

Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)
Gilt silver, rock crystal, sapphires, pearls, imitation glass, and doublets

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Created during a period of religious conflict, this arm reliquary took the form of a jeweled hand holding a relic of Saint Wenceslas. The reliquary was made to contain part of Wenceslas's arm, but the relic within was a fragment of a tibia believed to be from his body.

Reliquary bust of Saint Wenceslas, late fifteenth century

Prague

Parcel-gilt silver, amethysts, and glass

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Striking reliquary busts, carved in precious metal and nearly life-size, made the saints seem vividly present. In addition to containing relics, each sculpture displays the saint's identity and status. Wenceslas (907–935), depicted as a youthful warrior prince, is shown as Bohemia's patron saint. Rock-crystal windows allowed worshippers to glimpse the relics within, while jeweled surfaces proclaimed their sacred importance. Monumental reliquaries played central roles in ceremonies at Prague Castle, where they were carried in processions, displayed on feast days, and honored with crowns and other regalia. Together they embodied the dynastic and heavenly protectors of the Bohemian kingdom.

210 AD 903

So-called comb of Saint Adalbert, bishop of Prague, c. 1100

Northern Italy, possibly Rhineland, or Saxony (now in Germany)
Carved and drilled ivory

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This comb was not associated with Saint Adalbert (c. 956–997) until the seventeenth century and was probably used during liturgical services instead of being a relic.

Cup of Saint Wenceslas, tenth century

Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)

Pearwood

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

This cup, which once had a metal foot and lid, is traditionally identified as the vessel Wenceslas, on the eve of his murder, shared with guests of a feast hosted by his brother in Stará Boleslav (near Prague) around 935. Several of the conspirators who killed Wenceslas were in attendance. By the fourteenth century, the cup was shown together with Wenceslas's other relics at public displays in Prague that drew thousands of pilgrims. The cup later entered the St. Vitus Cathedral treasury, where it has remained with those same relics.

RENAISSANCE AND REPRESSION: JEWISH LIFE IN PRAGUE

“In his benevolence, our master, the renowned luminary Emperor Rudolf, may he be exalted, sent for our teacher Rabbi [Judah] Loew ben Bezalel, greeting him graciously, and speaking with him face to face as one man speaks to another. Their conversation dealt with esoteric subjects. This took place here, in Prague, on Sunday, the 3rd of Adar [5352] [16 February 1592].”

—David Gans, *Zemah David*, 1: 145–46

Whereas Charles IV (r. 1346–1378) turned Prague into a major spiritual center, Rudolf II (r. 1576–1612), the second emperor to reside in the city, was intent on fostering culture, artistic patronage, and the advancement of science. The grandeur of Prague, which Charles IV brought about and Rudolf II later revived, is captured in the 1606 view of the city on display here. Jews played an important part in the Rudolfine renaissance, with notable members of the Prague community establishing contact with prominent Christian figures. The emperor received the Maharal of Prague, the esteemed Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, who is associated with the legendary golem of Jewish literature and folklore.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, six new synagogues were built in Prague, and more followed elsewhere in the Czech Lands. These new houses of worship prompted the commissioning of ceremonial objects made with precious silver and exquisite textiles to beautify and protect their Torah scrolls. In 1564 the Jews of Prague established the first official Jewish burial society to oversee the care of the dead, a model for the founding of others in European Jewish communities. In the early sixteenth century, Hebrew printing presses were established in Prague, and an extraordinary revival of Hebrew manuscript production occurred in Bohemia and Moravia in the first half of the eighteenth century. This vibrant book culture, however, was the target of Church censorship, as Jews continued to suffer discrimination and an identifying badge remained mandatory. The works in this gallery, spanning more than three centuries, attest to the creativity and resilience of the Jewish communities in the Czech Lands.

Mattathias ben Jonah of Laun (scribe)
Workshop of Valentine Noh (artists, active in the 1470s)

Prague Hebrew Bible, 1489

Prague
Ink, gouache, and gold leaf on vellum
Volume 1 (left), Leviticus 1:1–5
Volume 2 (right), Judges 1:1–8

Mendel Gottesman Library, Yeshiva University, New York, Gift of Ludwig and Erica Jesselson

In the Middle Ages Jews and Christians often collaborated on the production of Hebrew books. Excluded from Christian craft guilds, which regulated the professions of painters and illuminators, Jews did not typically work as professional illuminators. Thus Jewish scribes often turned to Christian artists to decorate Hebrew manuscripts. These two illuminated manuscripts, part of a three-volume Hebrew Bible, were created by a Jewish scribe who penned the text and Christian illuminators who were responsible for the decorations. The same workshop also produced the Christian prayer book nearby. The biblical text is laid out in two columns with commentary by Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac) in the margins. Among the few still in existence from medieval Prague, this Hebrew manuscript was owned by the Berlin Court Jew Daniel Itzig, one of an elite group of Jewish financiers who provided services to European rulers in exchange for special privileges. The Hebrew Bible later belonged to the Jewish luminary Moses Mendelssohn, and Rabbi Abraham Geiger, a leader of Reform Judaism.

Workshop of Valentine Noh (artists, active in the 1470s)

Prayer book, 1470–80

Prague

Tempera, shell gold, and gold leaf on vellum

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

This Christian prayer book in Latin was produced in the same Prague workshop as the illuminated Hebrew Bible on display nearby. The manuscripts are visually similar in their ornamental borders with acanthus leaves in red, green, and blue, which issue from thin tendrils accented by golden spheres. Christian books such as this one feature illuminated initials, while Hebrew manuscripts including the Prague Bible present initial words within decorative panels since Hebrew has no capital letters. The initial letter “M” for “Maria” is decorated with a depiction of the Presentation of the infant Christ in the Temple.

Rötger Herfurth (1722–1776, master in 1748)

Torah shield, 1761

Frankfurt

Repoussé silver

The Jewish Museum, New York Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, JM 33-52
Provenance: unknown owner; heirless object salvaged from post-Nazi Europe by the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR), the cultural arm of the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JSRO); transferred to the Jewish Museum, 1953

In Ashkenazi (Central and Eastern European) tradition, a metal plaque fitted with movable plates customarily hangs from a dressed Torah to mark a specific section in the scroll for public reading at the synagogue. Filled with shells, flowers, and scrolls, this Torah shield was made during the same period and in a similar Rococo style as the relief from the tomb of Saint John of Nepomuk, displayed nearby. Yet, while in the latter the figure of the saint is enshrined at center, here the focus is on the plaque designating the Torah reading. In Frankfurt, as elsewhere in Central Europe, silversmithing guilds were open only to Christian craftsmen, so Jewish patrons had to commission ritual objects from Christian makers who also created works for churches.

Jakob Ebner

Saint John of Nepomuk with palm and cross, from the tomb of Saint John of Nepomuk, St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague, 1750–1800

Prague

Silver and gilt copper

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Jakob Ebner

Saint John of Nepomuk helping souls in Purgatory, from the tomb of Saint John of Nepomuk, St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague, 1750–1800

Prague

Silver and gilt copper

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

Depicted in this relief is one of the most revered saints in the Czech Lands, John of Nepomuk, a clergyman who in 1393 fell victim to a conflict between ecclesiastical and secular powers in Prague. Legend has it that after he refused to reveal secrets entrusted to him by Queen Sophia during confession, her husband King Wenceslas IV (Emperor Charles IV's son) had Nepomuk thrown from the Charles Bridge into the Vltava River. Following the saint's canonization in 1729, his monumental silver tomb was erected in St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague. These two reliefs originally decorated the tomb.

Hanukkah lamp, eighteenth century

Probably Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)
Repoussé copper alloy

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 3273
Provenance: unknown owner; acquired by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1940s–60s

At the center of this lamp is the Star of David, within which appears the rendering of a hat. The Jews of Prague may have adopted the Star of David as their symbol as early as the fourteenth century, and Emperor Charles IV granted them the privilege of having their own banner with the hexagram. In the sixteenth century, Prague Jews incorporated a hat into the Star of David as part of their emblem, after the cap they were mandated to wear to set them apart from Christians. This discriminatory mark eventually became a form of self-identification.

Hanukkah lamp, second half of the nineteenth century

Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)

Cast copper alloy

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 3363
Provenance: unknown owner; acquired by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1940s–60s

Nicolaas van Swinderen (1705–1760)

Medal commemorating the repeal of the edict expelling the Jews from Prague, 1745

The Hague, the Netherlands

Cast and struck silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, The Samuel and Daniel M. Friedenberg Collection, FB 267

Provenance: unknown owner; Samuel Friedenberg, by 1930s at the earliest; donated to the Jewish Museum, early 1950s

In late 1744 Holy Roman Empress Maria Theresa issued an edict expelling the Jews from Prague. Dutch Jews enlisted Bartel Douwe, the Dutch ambassador in Vienna, who sought to get the order revoked. This medal was commissioned to celebrate the anticipated repeal, but the expulsion was only deferred. Douwe, depicted as a warrior, addresses the enthroned empress while pointing at the High Priest, symbolizing Bohemian Jewry "threatened with exile," as stated in Latin. The biblical quote, "May the queen [instead of "king"] not suspect her royal subjects in such way," implies that the edict resulted from alleged Jewish disloyalty to the crown during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48), which centered on Maria Theresa's, rather than Prussia's, right to inherit Austria.

After Johann Kleinhard

Jan Jiri Baltzer (printer)

Portrait of David ben Abraham Oppenheimer, Chief Rabbi of Prague, 1733

Prague

Engraving

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 4143

Provenance: unknown owner; acquired by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1956

David Abraham Oppenheim (also known as Oppenheimer) (1664–1736) was the Chief Rabbi of Prague and a renowned Hebrew bibliophile. His more than 780 Hebrew manuscripts and 4,000 printed books in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Aramaic constituted one of the most important private Jewish libraries ever assembled. To avoid Jesuit censorship of Hebrew books in Prague, he resorted to keeping his collection at his father-in-law's home in Hanover. After Rabbi Oppenheim's death, the collection was passed down in his family, was appraised by Moses Mendelssohn, and was ultimately acquired in 1829 by the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford.

Gershom Solomon Kohen Katz (printer, c. 1475–1544)
Me'ir ben Ya'akov ha-Levi Epshtain (printer)
Shelomoh bar Shemu'el ha-Levi (printer)
Hayim bar David Shahor (printer)
Me'ir bar David ha-nirmaz Mikhtam le-David (printer)

Prayer Book for the Entire Year, 1522–25

Prague

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

This is one of two volumes of a lavish Hebrew prayer book whose decorated borders incorporate Jewish motifs such as the Star of David, which became the symbol of the Jewish community of Prague. The margins also include imagery borrowed from Christian printed books such as putti and other nude figures. In strict compliance with the Second Commandment's ban on rendering the human form, the figural elements were defaced in an act of self-censorship.

Hayyim Shahor Schwartz (artist, c. 1490–1549)
Gershom Solomon Kohen Katz (printer, c. 1475–1544)
Gronem Katz (printer)

Prague Haggadah, 1526

Prague
Woodcut

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

The Haggadah is both the liturgical order for the Passover meal, or seder, and a collection of texts read during the ritual that commemorates the Israelites' redemption from slavery in Egypt. The Prague Haggadah of 1526 is one of the most notable products of early Hebrew printing. Richly decorated, the book combines newly created illustrations for the Passover narrative with Christian motifs. A king holding a covered beaker illustrates the first kiddush, the blessing over the first cup of wine at the start of the meal. Originally the cup was topped by a cross, which was removed in this copy.

Judah Loew ben Bezalel
(known as the Maharal, c. 1525–1609)

The Eternal Israel (Netzah Israel), 1599

Prague

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

Head of a yeshiva (a school of Jewish learning) in Prague, Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, known as the Maharal, was one of the most prominent figures of sixteenth-century Bohemian Jewry. Among his several philosophical works is *The Eternal Israel* (*Netzah Israel*), which focuses on the meanings of exile and redemption.

Gershom Solomon Kohen Katz (printer, c. 1475–1544)

Hebrew Pentateuch, 1518

Prague

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

This 1518 Pentateuch (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, or Torah) is one of the earliest Hebrew books printed in Prague. Likely produced in a rented Christian printing house, the volume features decorative elements borrowed from Christian sources that used Classical models such as seminude figures. The book is open to the frontispiece of the Book of Genesis, its title surmounted by a medallion held by angels. Within the medallion is a pair of hands in priestly blessing, the symbol of the printing house of Gershom Solomon Kohen Katz, a descendant of the Kohanim (priests) of the ancient Jerusalem Temple.

David ben Solomon Gans (author, 1541–1613)
Shelomoh Kohen (printer)

Descendants of David (Zemah David), 1592

Prague

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

The Jewish historiographer and scientist David Gans was a salient figure in Prague during the reign of Rudolf II, meeting court figures such as the famed astronomer Tycho Brahe. Gans's *Descendants of David* (*Zemah David*) stands out for its wide scope, comprising a chronology of Jewish life from biblical Adam to the author's time and a survey of world history that includes Gregorian calendar dates for Christian-era events. The book is open to the years 1575 to 1578, citing the appointment of Rudolph II as Holy Roman Emperor in 1576.

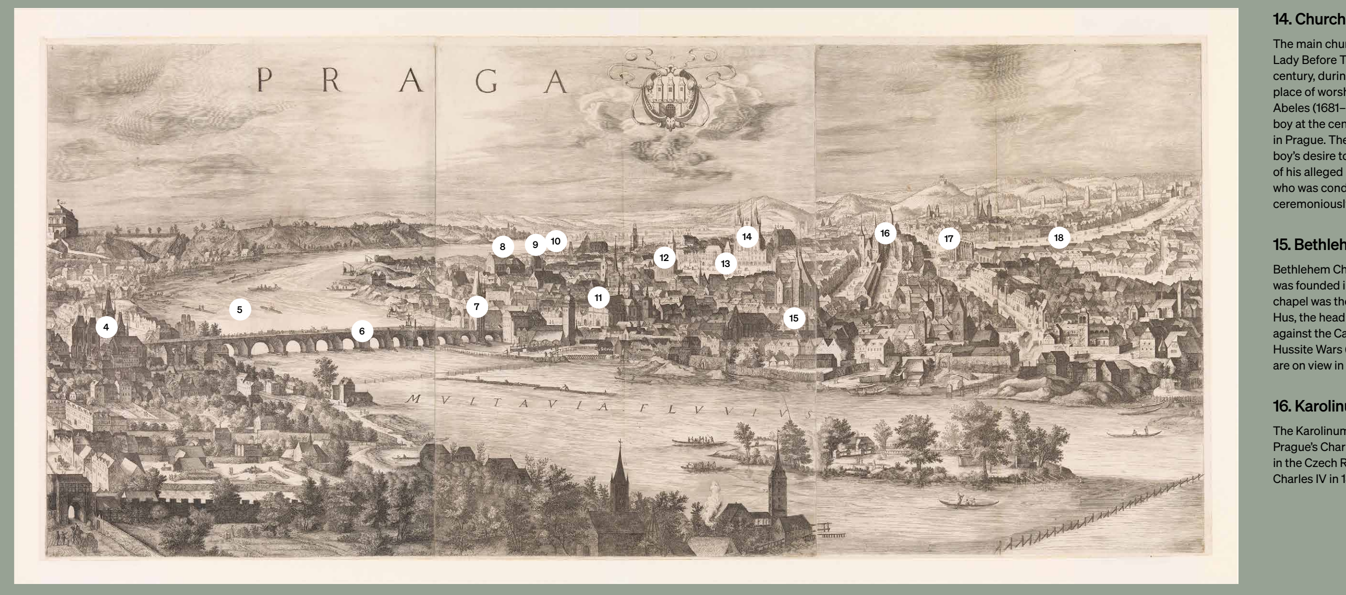
Grandchildren of Yehuda Bak (printer)

Talmudic tractate Laws Concerning Blessings (Hilkhot Berakhot), 1727–28

Prague

Mendel Gottesman Library, Yeshiva University, New York

The appointment of the Jesuit Franciscus Haselbauer as head censor in 1712 led to intensified censorship of Hebrew books in Prague. The Talmud—the great compendium of rabbinical law and ethics—became a primary target. More than one hundred copies were burned and hardly any could be procured in Bohemia between 1715 and 1725. In 1728 the publication of a highly censored version of the Talmudic tractate *Laws Concerning Blessings* (*Hilkhot Berakhot*)—a collaboration between Haselbauer and Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschütz—scandalized Prague's Jewish community. The publication of subsequent censored tractates was soon halted. On view here is probably one of three surviving copies.



Philip van den Bossche
(artist, active c. 1604–15)
Johannes Wechter
(engraver, c. 1550–after 1606)
Aegidius Saedler
(printer, c. 1568–1629)

View of the City of Prague, 1606

Prague
Etching

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1953

A masterpiece of printmaking, this large-scale panorama of Prague offers a sweeping view of the city from the slopes above Smíchov to the west of the Vltava River, southwest of the city center. Though created in 1606 during Rudolf II's cultural renaissance, the image of the city reflects Charles IV's fourteenth-century transformations—the development of the New Town, the building of bridges and markets, the construction of Charles University, and his refashioning of St. Vitus Cathedral into a Gothic marvel.

The Jewish Quarter (Josefov), on the river's east bank at the northeast end of the Old Town, sits farthest from the viewer. Nearby Christian landmarks such as the Convent of Saint Agnes and the Church of Saints Simon and Jude are clearly indicated. A building resembling the Altneuschul (Old-New Synagogue), built in the 1270s, can be discerned. Jewish life in Prague in the seventeenth century was undergoing a renaissance of its own, including the addition of four synagogues to serve the community, although they are also not indicated in this view.

Selected Sites from the View of the City of Prague, 1606

The heart of Prague is divided into several historic neighborhoods located on both sides of the Vltava River. On the east bank lie the Old Town, Jewish Quarter (Josefov), and New Town. On the west bank is the Lesser Town with Prague Castle on a hill and St. Vitus Cathedral as part of the castle complex. The Charles Bridge links the two sides of the city, connecting the Old Town to the Lesser Town.

1. Prague Castle

Prague Castle was probably founded c. 880 by a Přemyslid prince. The early tenth-century churches on its grounds were dedicated to Saints George and Vitus, the latter of which became St. Vitus Cathedral. The castle was later the seat of both secular and religious rulers, and, under Charles IV and Rudolf II, the imperial residence.

2. St. Vitus Cathedral

First constructed as a basilica, this main church of Prague Castle since the eleventh century served as a principal repository of relics and burial site of rulers. The building was transformed into a Gothic cathedral during the reigns of Charles IV and his son Wenceslas IV. The cathedral was not completed until the early twentieth century.

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3. Benedictine Convent of Saint George

This was the first convent in Bohemia, located on the grounds of Prague Castle. The arm reliquary of Saint George and the arm and bust reliquaries of Saint Ludmila on view in the exhibition were kept in the convent before they became part of the treasury of St. Vitus Cathedral.

4. Lesser Town Bridge Tower

Dating to 1464, the Lesser Town Bridge Tower is the entrance to Lesser Town from the Charles Bridge. The construction was based on the Old Town Bridge Tower built by Peter Parler, the architect of St. Vitus Cathedral. A reliquary dedicated by the Parler family is on view in this exhibition.

5. Vltava River

6. Prague Bridge (now Charles Bridge)

This famous bridge links the Old Town to the Lesser Town. After an earlier bridge there collapsed, Prague Bridge began to be constructed in 1357 under Charles IV and was completed in 1402.

7. Old Town Bridge Tower

The Old Town Bridge Tower was built in the 1370s–80s by Peter Parler, the architect of St. Vitus Cathedral, in honor of Charles IV and his son Wenceslas IV. Sculptures of both rulers appear on the tower, along with patron saints of Bohemia.

8. Altneuschul (Old-New Synagogue)

Unidentified in the 1606 Prague view ledger, this structure appears to be the Altneuschul, the oldest existing synagogue still active in Europe. The house of worship was erected around 1270 by Christian builders who worked in the nearby Convent of Saint Agnes. Capitals from both buildings are on display in the exhibition.

9. Church of Saints Simon and Jude

10. Convent of Saint Agnes of Bohemia

The convent was established in the 1230s by Saint Agnes, a princess of the Přemyslid dynasty, to which Charles IV also belonged. Masons who erected the convent also worked at the nearby Altneuschul. Capitals from both buildings are on display in the exhibition.

11. Clementinum and Saint Salvator Church

Founded by the Catholic Jesuit order in 1556, the Clementinum is a major educational institution in Prague and home to an important astronomical observatory. In 1581 Mordecai Maisel, a prominent Jewish philanthropist, donated funds toward the building of Saint Salvator Church within the Clementinum.

12. Old Town Hall

In Old Town Square, the hall was established in 1338 under Charles IV's father, John of Luxembourg. Original sculptural work dates to the second half of the fourteenth century. Its astronomical clock has been in operation for more than six hundred years.

13. Old Town Square

At the heart of Prague's Old Town, the square was originally a marketplace dating back to the tenth century.

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MVLTAVIA

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14. Church of Our Lady Before Týn

The main church in Old Town, Church of Our Lady Before Týn, dates to the fourteenth century, during the reign of Charles IV. The place of worship houses the tomb of Simon Abeles (1681–February 21, 1694), a Jewish boy at the center of an anti-Jewish episode in Prague. The Church claimed that the boy's desire to be baptized was the cause of his alleged murder by his tutor, a relative, who was condemned to death. Abeles was ceremoniously buried on this site.

15. Bethlehem Chapel

Bethlehem Chapel in the Old Town of Prague was founded in the late fourteenth century. The chapel was the main preaching site used by Jan Hus, the head of a reformation movement against the Catholic Church that led to the Hussite Wars (1419–34). Works from this period are on view in the previous room.

16. Karolinum

The Karolinum is the medieval section of Prague's Charles University, the main university in the Czech Republic, which was established by Charles IV in 1348.

17. Carmelite Monastery and Church of Our Lady of the Snows

Charles IV founded this complex in 1347 to commemorate his coronation as King of Bohemia. He and his first wife, Blanche of Valois, appear in a relief from around 1350 originally located in the church tower. A crown that may have belonged to her, excavated as part of the Środa Śląska Treasure, is on view in the previous room.

18. Horse Market (now Wenceslas Square)

Charles IV established this open square in 1348 as part of his development of the New Town. Wenceslas, the head of the Přemyslids (the first Czech royal dynasty), was murdered by his own brother and became the patron saint of Bohemia. The square serves as the main one in Prague to this day.

19. New Town Hall

New Town Hall was built at the Cattle Market (now Charles Square) in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, following Charles IV's founding of New Town in 1348 as part of his master plan to expand the city.

20. Cattle Market (now Charles Square)

Under Charles IV the square became the site of annual displays of relics attracting pilgrims from lands near and far.

21. Corpus Christi Chapel (no longer standing)

Once located in the Cattle Market (now Charles Square)—the site of annual relic displays—the Corpus Christi Chapel was originally a wooden tower and then built as a tall stone structure and chapel in the 1390s. The church was inspired by Jerusalem's sacred architecture, including the Holy Sepulcher and the ancient Temple (later the site of the Dome of the Rock).

22. Saint Apollinaris Church

Founded by Charles IV in 1362, the church features fourteenth-century frescoes of Christian figures standing on the busts of Hebrew Bible prophets.

23. Emmaus Slavonic Monastery

Charles IV established the Emmaus Slavonic Monastery in 1347. The monastery's cloister displays a cycle of frescoes, created in the second half of the fourteenth century, with scenes from the Hebrew Bible, the Christian New Testament, and related sources.

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SAC . CÆS . MAI . PRIVILEGIO
EIUSDEM MAI . SCULPTOR
ÆGIDIUS SADELER EXCUDIT

24. Vyšehrad Castle Ruins

The ruins, dating back to the tenth century, are located on top of a hill on the east bank of the Vlatva River. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the castle was the seat of power of the Přemyslid dynasty (Charles IV's ancestors). Reliquary arms and busts associated with two prominent members of this dynasty, Saints Wenceslas and Ludmila, are on view in the previous room.

9/9/26 1:39 PM

Torah mantle, 1779–80 (date of inscription)

Prague

Silk and metallic thread brocade embroidered with metallic threads; metallic ribbon and fringe; linen; semiprecious stone or glass

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Rabbi Joel S. and Sylvia Mintz Geffen, JM 32-77
Provenance: Frumet (the daughter of Simcha Rabbetz and the widow of Rabbi Isaac Popper) donated to the Klausen Synagogue, Prague, 1810; unknown owner; Jewish Museum in Prague (founded in 1906, abolished by the Nazis in 1939, and the collection was taken over by the Prague Jewish community until the founding of the Central Jewish Museum in 1942); unknown owner; Rabbi Joel S. Geffen, Jewish Theological Seminary; donated to the Jewish Museum, 1977

Torah mantle, 1829, donated to the Burial Society of Jemnice in 1872

Moravia (now Czech Republic)

Silk, metal thread, linen, and canvas

Jewish Museum in Prague

Johann Nowotný (1815–81, master in 1853)

Burial comb and nail pick of the Bischitz Burial Society, 1855–56 (date of inscription)

Prague

Engraved silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Frances and Hubert J. Brandt, 2012-91.1-2

Provenance: unknown owner; purchased by Frances and Hubert J. Brandt, Sotheby's Tel Aviv, 1991; donated to the Jewish Museum, 2012

Following the founding of the first modern Jewish burial society in Prague in 1564, other communities throughout Europe soon established their own iterations. Special implements like these, usually made in silver and often bearing Hebrew inscriptions, were fashioned to enable members to carry out their duties.

Beaker of the Polná Burial Society, 1691 (date of inscription)

Polná (now in Czech Republic)
Enameled glass

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 3211
Provenance: unknown owner; purchased by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, c. 1952

This is probably the oldest known glass beaker of a burial society, which administered assistive services and cleansed and buried the dead in accordance with Jewish law. In imitation of the practices of Christian guilds, large, decorated beakers such as this one were often used for wine drinking at burial societies' annual banquets. Following a day of fasting and reflection, these celebrations were usually held on 7 of Adar (in February–March), the traditional anniversary of the birth and death of the biblical leader Moses. The Hebrew inscription indicates that the vessel belonged to the Holy Society of Morticians in Polná, a Bohemian town. Members are depicted accompanying a bier containing a coffin to the cemetery.

Wenzel Kabeš (1816–1866, master in 1846)

Torah ark curtain bells, 1861

Prague

Engraved silver

The Jewish Museum, New York, Purchase: Irene Zwerling Schenck Gift in memory of Harry and Celia Zwerling, 1993-278a-b
Provenance: unknown owner; purchased by the Jewish Museum, Sommerset Auction, New York, 1993

In Judaism it is customary to dedicate ritual objects bearing inscriptions in memory of departed loved ones to the synagogue. This pair of Torah ark curtain bells belonged to a larger set dedicated in remembrance of Sarel Dosenvi by her husband. The hanging of bells on the Torah ark curtain is a unique Bohemian and Moravian custom, inspired by the bells that adorned the robe of the High Priest at the ancient Temple in Jerusalem.

Zacharias Wagner (1680–1733, master in 1712)

Torah shield, 1717–18

Torah pointer, 1717–18

Augsburg (now in Germany)

Repoussé, gilt, cast, and engraved silver

Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 70c-d

Provenance: unknown owner; acquired by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1939–41

This shield and pointer, designed to facilitate the reading of the Torah, were created as a set. The lavish shield is replete with decoration including two rampant lions holding a laver and a basin, probably indicating that the commissioner was a descendant of the Levites, who assisted the Kohanim (priests) with ritual handwashing in the ancient Jerusalem Temple. The doubled tails of the lions—the symbol of Czech Republic to this day—may denote that this set was intended for a Bohemian synagogue. Jewish ritual objects from the area often bear similar lions.

Possibly a Torah cover, c. 1600

Prague

Linen appliquéd with silk and velvet and embroidered with silk thread

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Morris L. Cohen, JM 92-59
Provenance: unknown owner; Mr. and Mrs. Morris L. Cohen, New Jersey; donated to the Jewish Museum, 1959

ABOVE

Torah mantle, 1768–69

Bohemia (now in Czech Republic)
Silk and metallic thread brocade; velvet: embroidered with silk and metallic thread; metallic fringe; linen; wood

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 4615
Provenance: unknown owner; possibly Jewish Museum in Prague (founded in 1906, abolished by the Nazis in 1939, and the collection was taken over by the Prague Jewish community until the founding of Central Jewish Museum in 1942); unknown owner; acquired by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1958

In Central European communities the Torah scroll is protected with a decorated textile mantle, which is removed when the scroll is taken out of the Torah ark and placed on the synagogue reading platform. In the late sixteenth century a distinctive type developed in Prague. Flat and rectangular in form, mantles such as this one are composed of two textile panels sewn together, with a Hebrew inscription beginning on the front panel and concluding on the back. Here the inscription records that the mantle was dedicated to a synagogue by Shimon Segal and his wife Friedel.

ABOVE

Torah ark valance, 1718–19

Prague

Silk velvet embroidered with silk and metallic threads, applied silver and copper alloy settings, semiprecious stone, burlap backing

The Jewish Museum, New York, The H. Ephraim and Mordecai Benguiat Family Collection, S 1

Provenance: High Synagogue, Prague, possibly until renovations in 1883; unknown owner; Hadji Ephraim Benguiat (1852–1918), by 1893; purchased by the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1931; transferred to the Jewish Museum, 1950s

This valance once hung above the Torah ark of Prague's High Synagogue, built in 1568 as the private synagogue of the Jewish community council under the leadership of Mordecai Maisel. Suspended above the Torah curtain, the textile marks the ark, which contains the Torah scroll, as the synagogue's focal point. In Hebrew, such a valance is called a *kapporet*, recalling the golden lid of the Ark of the Covenant, its cherubim wings framing the sacred space from which divine presence was understood to appear. Inspired by this biblical imagery, this valance depicts the Tablets of the Law at center surmounted by cherubim, here rendered as eagles. Additional motifs in the scalloped edges represent liturgical implements from the Temple in Jerusalem, among them the seven-branch menorah, the High Priest's breastplate, and the altar.

215 AD 904

ABOVE

Torah mantle inscription panels, 1730–40

Prague

Embroidered silk with silk and metallic thread and seed pearls

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman in honor of Mrs. Frieda Schiff Warburg, F 2700a-b
Provenance: possibly from the Klausen Synagogue, Prague; unknown owner; acquired by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1951

These panels were once part of a Torah mantle donated by a couple who were members of a privileged minority known as Court Jews. The Hebrew dedication over the two panels reads: "This belongs to Micha[e]l, son of David of Halberstadt / and his wife Henle, daughter of Mendel of Frankfurt am Main." The inscription is rendered in magnificent seed-pearl embroidery, a traditional Bohemian technique from the late Middle Ages. The same type of embroidery is also used in fine ecclesiastical textiles, such as a series of late fourteenth- to early fifteenth-century textile fragments from altar decorations in the treasury of St. Vitus Cathedral, on view in the previous gallery.

Aryeh Judah Leib of Trebitsch (scribe and artist, active in 1712–39)

Prayer book, 1715–16

Vienna

Ink and gouache on vellum; engraving on paper

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Evelyn and Bob Roberts, JM 85-79
Provenance: unknown owner; found by Sargeant R. H. Roberts in Gestapo Headquarters, Trier, Germany, March 1945 (binding restored); donated to the Jewish Museum, 1979

This lavish Hebrew prayer book is an example of an extraordinary renaissance of Hebrew manuscript production during the eighteenth century. Long after the invention of the printing press, beautifully decorated books were commissioned for private use by a privileged few known as Court Jews, who attained prominence serving rulers in Central Europe. Aryeh Judah Leib of Trebitsch, who copied and illustrated this book, was one of a group of scribe-artists who hailed from Bohemia and Moravia and were primarily active in Vienna, where most of their affluent patrons resided. On display nearby are manuscripts by his fellow artists. The strong influence of Christian art on these pages may have led to the defacing of the angels, likely by one of its Jewish owners.

Aaron Wolf Herlingen of Gewitsch (scribe and artist)

Grace After Meals, Daily Blessings, and Prayers for Bedtime, 1724

Vienna

Ink and gouache on vellum

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

This intimate book of prayers was commissioned by the Court Jew Isaac Oppenheim for his daughter Hanna. Its maker, Aaron Wolf Herlingen of Gewitsch in Moravia, was later a scribe at the Imperial Library of Vienna. Adapting the text for female use he omitted the traditional phrase, "Blessed is the man who trusts in God, and to whom God is the source of his trusts," at the end of *Grace After Meals*. On the left page, men gathered at table don the ruffled collars Jews in the Czech Lands were mandated to wear from 1670 until Empress Maria Theresa ended the requirement in 1750.

Joseph ben David Leipnik (scribe and artist, active in 1730–40)

Passover Haggadah, 1732

Darmstadt (now in Germany)
Ink, gouache, powdered gold, and gold leaf on vellum

The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

The Passover Haggadah recounts the story of the Israelites' journey from bondage in Egypt to freedom, which is based on the biblical Book of Exodus, an epic story that lent itself to being illustrated. Joseph ben David Leipnik relied heavily on the printed Amsterdam Haggadah of 1695, a widely imitated decorated version of the text, which had been illustrated by a Jewish convert to Christianity. Updating some illustrations to suit the fashions of his time, on the right page the Israelites wear eighteenth-century dress, some traveling by horse or carriage as they leave Egypt, which is rendered as a castle.

Meshullam Zimmel of Polná (scribe and artist)

Book of Genesis with commentaries, 1715–16

Probably Prague

Brown ink on parchment, gilding

The Morgan Library & Museum, Gift of the Trustees of the Dannie and Hettie Heineman Collection, 1977

This is one of the earliest known works by the noteworthy scribe and artist Meshullam Zimmel of Polná. The right page features four stunning initial Hebrew words, including *Barukh* (blessed) on the upper right. Inside the letters of the word is the artist's name and date of the work, or colophon, thus reading as a blessing for him embarking on his career; his stand-in sets off staff in hand. On the lower left *Samhenu* (bring us joy) appears within the symbol of the Habsburg Empire, a double-headed eagle, here divested of its crown and outstretched talons. The ensuing text reads, "May no outsider usurp David's throne, and may no other inherit his glory," a challenge to secular rule at a time when Emperor Charles VI sought to reduce the Jewish population of Prague.

Johan Michael Ernst II (active in 1717–41, master in 1717)

Torah or Haftarah scroll crown, c. 1725–50

Bavaria (now in Germany)

Repoussé, pierced, and parcel-gilt silver and glass

The Jewish Museum, New York, Gift of Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 1749
Provenance: unknown owner; acquired by Harry G. Friedman for the Jewish Museum, 1946

Rinaldo Ranzoni (1671–1737)

Imperial crown for a statuette of the infant Christ, 1712

Prague

Gilt silver and cut glass

The Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague

These crowns were made to adorn the sacred within Judaism and Christianity. One was likely placed on a small Torah scroll as part of its ceremonial dress, honoring the Torah as sovereign in Jewish tradition, or atop a Haftarah scroll, which contains readings from the Books of Prophets that supplement the weekly Torah portion. The other crowned a devotional statuette of Christ of a type related to the venerated Infant of Prague, which honors Jesus as king from infancy. Both crowns are worked in silver with dense ornamentation and curling forms that are characteristic of the Baroque style.