

From Spain to the Balkans: Textile Torah Scroll Accessories in the Sephardi Communities of the Balkans

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When the curtain of the *hekal*—the Holy ark—of a Sephardi synagogue in the Balkans is drawn back and its doors thrown open, a colorful, complex sight is revealed (fig. 1): Torah scrolls enveloped in wrappers and binders, mostly hidden beneath mantles which open in front. Mounted on the hard top of each such mantle is a silver crown, from which rise high silver finials. The sight recalls the way Torah scrolls are kept in other European communities—which is not surprising, since the practice of Balkan Sephardi communities in this area is based on the common European tradition, whose geographical provenance expanded when the Spanish refugees brought it to the Balkans and to North Africa. The common denominator of the way Torah scrolls are kept in these communities is the material of which the various accessories were made: cloth. All other Jewish communities in the East and the Eastern Mediterranean, including Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, keep their Torah scrolls in vertical—cylindrical or prismatic—wooden cases. This sharp distinction has its roots in the ways books were customarily stored and protected in antiquity, when the usual form of a book was a scroll.

Much has been written of the various accessories used in antiquity to store Torah scrolls in a respectful manner: ¹ the receptacle in which Torah scrolls were kept; the case used to carry the scroll from place to place; and

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¹ For a comprehensive account see B. YANIV, *The Torah Case: Its History and Design* (Hebrew; Jerusalem & Ramat-Gan 1997), pp. 41-127. For a shorter account see B. YANIV, "Regional Variations of Torah Cases from the Islamic World," in *For Every Thing a Season*, ed. J. Gutmann (Cleveland 2002), pp. 38-76.

the linen or woolen cloth wrapped around the scroll. The latter was known in Hebrew as the *mitpaḥat*, a word originally denoting a piece of fabric such as a wrap, towel or even sheet, or, in literature from the Land of Israel, the *mappah*,² which is simply the Latin *mappa*. This wrap is the point of departure for the following discussion, for in antiquity it was employed by scroll users of all faiths, and among the Jews—in all parts of the Diaspora.

The *mitpaḥat* or *mappah* was a square-shaped piece of fabric woven of wool or linen,³ adorned with colored threads, to some of which bells might be attached.⁴ It was secured to the scroll by “the cords and ribbons in the wraps of books.”⁵ The woolen and linen wraps found in the Judean desert probably had other uses as well, but they fit the literary descriptions and presumably exemplify the wraps used for scrolls. The fact that a woolen wrap was found in the Cave of the Letters as part of a shroud enabled Yadin to identify it as one normally used for a scroll (fig. 2).⁶

However, the artifacts referred to in the Mishnah and the Talmuds typify *realia* in contemporary use in the Land of Israel and Babylonia, not the situation in Europe. The earliest available sources for the storage of Torah scrolls are the depictions of open holy arks in the funerary art of the Jews of Rome.⁷ Among these sources are fourth-century objects made of gold glass, on which Torah scrolls are shown placed in a wooden

² E.g., *Soferim* 3:22; JT, *Beraḳot* 6:4.

³ See A. M. HABERMAN, *The Judean Desert Scrolls* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv 1959), p. 21, fig. 12; Y. YADIN, *The Finds from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of the Letters* (Jerusalem 1963), pp. 179-259; Y. YADIN, “The Judean Desert Scrolls” (Hebrew), in W. F. ALBRIGHT, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Hebrew translation by A. AMIR, with supplementary chapters by Y. YADIN; Tel Aviv 1965), p. 246; E. L. SUKENIK, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Second Survey* (Hebrew; Jerusalem 1950), pp. 7-21; G. M. CROWFOOT, “The Linen Textiles,” in *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert, I: Qumran Cave I*, ed. D. BARTHÉLÉMY & J. T. MILIK (Oxford 1955), pp. 18-26, fig. 4.

⁴ “If one makes bells for the mortar..., and for the *mitpaḥot* of scrolls,... if they have a clapper...” (BT *Šabbat* 58b).

⁵ Tosefta, *Kelim* BM 9:5 (ed. Lieberman, III, p. 64); Maimonides, *Hil. Kelim* 20:10; cf. also Tosefta, *Yadayim* 2:12 (ed. Zuckerman, p. 683); for further finds from the Judean Desert and other regions see YANIV, *Torah Case*, p. 35 n. 30.

⁶ YADIN, *Finds*, p. 244.

⁷ For graffiti in the catacombs see E. R. GOODENOUGH, *Jewish Symbols in Greco-Roman Period* (New York 1953), vol. III, figs. 706, 707, 710 (Monteverde); 817 (Via Torlonia).



Fig. 1. Open Sephardi ark (*hekal*), "Ez Hayyim" Synagogue, Istanbul, 1983 (Photograph by Esther Juhasz), from: E. JUHASZ, *The Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire: Chapters in their Material Culture* (Hebrew; Jerusalem 1989), p. 94, fig. 35.

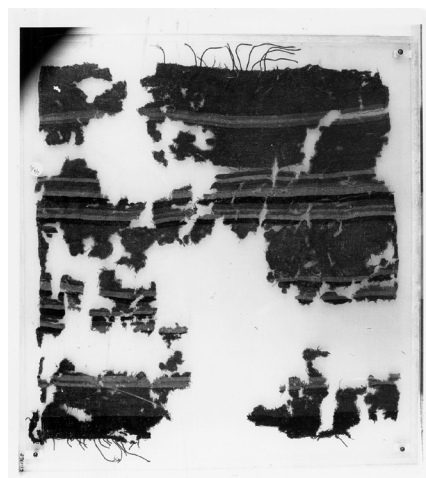


Fig. 2. Wrapper (*mitpahat*), Naḥal Ḥever, Judean Desert, 120–135 CE; red, blue and yellow wool, 46 by 50 cm; Israel Antiquities Authority, no. 61-1385.

cupboard, divided into nine cells; the scrolls are shown schematically, in a horizontal position (fig. 3).⁸ Indeed, scrolls were usually kept horizontally in the libraries of the Roman world.⁹ It was also customary there to wrap important scrolls in cloth, and this practice, together with the structure of the cabinet in which the scrolls were stored, ultimately made the *mitṭpaḥat/mappah* the main accessory for the storage of Torah scrolls in Europe. In communities that used wooden cases, however, the *mitṭpaḥat* became a secondary item, being separated from the scroll and instead placed on the case. How did this development come about?

A study of the two systems for storing Torah scrolls—cloth wraps and wooden cases—combined with a comparison of the geographical provenance of each system, on the one hand, and the space or receptacle in which the scrolls were stored, on the other, indicates a close connection between the system—wrap or case—and the type of receptacle used. In some parts of the Jewish world, the Torah ark was an open niche, and the scrolls kept in it had to be held fast and, being exposed, protected; such communities evolved the rigid (wooden) case.¹⁰ Cloth wraps evolved in Europe, where Torah arks were designed as receptacles, closed by two doors.¹¹

⁸ For further gold glass bases see D. P. BARAG, “Glass”, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, III (Jerusalem 1971), col. 607, fig. 1.

⁹ For an illustration of a Roman library see YANIV, *Torah Case*, fig. 9.

¹⁰ On the early Holy arks, which were niches, see E. L. SUKENIK, *The Synagogue of Dura-Europos and Its Paintings* (Hebrew; Jerusalem 1947), p. 44; S. GUTMAN, Z. YEIVIN & E. NETZER, “Excavation of the Synagogue at Ḥorvat Susiyah” (Hebrew), *Qadmoniot* 5:2 (1972), p. 50; Z. ILAN, *Ancient Synagogues in the Land of Israel* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv 1991), p. 96; A. YEIVIN, “The Synagogue at Eshtemoa” (Hebrew), *Qadmoniot* 5:2 (1972), p. 44; ID., “The Synagogue at Chorazin—A Proposal for Reconstruction of the Southern Wall” (Hebrew), *Eretz-Israel* 18 (1985), p. 296; G. FOERSTER, “Ancient Synagogues in the Land of Israel” (Hebrew), *Qadmoniot* 5:2 (1972), p. 40 (Arbel). For a comprehensive discussion of the niche see R. HACHLIL, “The Niche and ark in Ancient Synagogues,” *BASOR* CCXXIII (1976), pp. 43–54.

¹¹ Holy arks of this design were in use in the Land of Israel as well, as attested by representations in synagogue mosaics from the fourth to sixth centuries, as well as the wooden cabinets depicted in funerary art from Beth Shearim (third to fourth centuries). For the latter see GOODENOUGH, *Jewish Symbols*, III, fig. 60; M. HARAN, “Torah and Bible Scrolls in the First Centuries of the Christian Era” (Hebrew), *Shnaton. Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 10 (1986–1989), p. 102; B. MAZAR (MAISLER), *Beth She'arim*, vol. I (Jerusalem 1957), pp. 110–113.



Fig. 3. Representation of Holy ark on gold glass, Rome, 4th century, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, no. 66.36.14.

Two types of cabinet with doors¹² were in use in medieval Europe, namely, Spain, Italy and Franco-Germany. Some were built into niches,¹³ while others were freestanding wooden cabinets, as we shall see below.¹⁴ These cabinets furnished adequate protection, so that there was no need of any covering for the scroll other than the *miṭpaḥat* or *map-*

¹² Doors in Holy arks are mentioned in Franco-Germany by R. Judah he-Ḥasid (Regensburg, d. 1217): "The keys to the Holy ark have been lost" (*Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. J. H. WISTINETZKY & J. FREIMANN [Frankfurt a/M 1924], para. 489; cf. also para. 494); and in Spain (Daroca) by R. Yom Tov b. Abraham al-Iṣbili (ca. 1250–1330): "And they began to break the doors of the *hekal* in which the Torah scrolls were kept..." (*Responsa*, ed. Y. QAFIḤ [Jerusalem 1959], no. 159).

¹³ See R. WISCHNITZER, *The Architecture of the European Synagogue* (Philadelphia 1964), pp. 28 (the synagogue at Cordoba, Spain) and 53 (*Altneuschul*, Prague).

¹⁴ Freestanding cabinets, including Holy arks, of this type are described in Franco-German manuscripts. For a selection of such arks see T. & M. METZGER, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (Fribourg 1982), pp. 90, 92, 96, 128, 137 and 138. The earliest surviving ark of this type, in Modena, Italy, is dated to 1472; see V. B. MANN (ed.), *Gardens and Ghettos* (New York 1989), p. 112.



Fig. 4. *Tripartite Mahazor*, Festival prayer book according to Ashkenazi rite for special Sabbaths, Purim, and Passover with the Song of Songs and a commentary; South Germany, ca. 1320. Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Ms. A. 384, fol. 183.

pah. The depictions of open arks from Rome indicate that further protection could be assured by placing each scroll in a separate compartment. While the schematic representation of the scrolls makes it impossible to identify their wrappings, it is clear that there was no need of a rigid case to protect the Torah scroll in a cabinet that could be closed.

Another look at the gold glass from Rome indicates that there must have been a connection between the way Torah scrolls were kept in the ark, on the one hand, and the position of the scrolls—horizontal or vertical, on the other. Our earliest documentation of a Torah scroll, in the South-German *Tripartite Mahazor* (festival prayer book) of ca. 1320, shows the scroll standing vertically in

the ark, with a binder wound around it from top to bottom (fig. 4).¹⁵ Hence, by the beginning of the fourteenth century Torah scrolls were being kept vertically in the ark; this necessitated a further accessory—the long binder, as distinct from the *mappah*, which was square.

This innovation raises several questions: Why was the method used to keep scrolls changed? Was there some connection between this change and the position of the scroll in the ark? And when did the change take place?

Our earliest visual evidence relating to Sephardi Torah scrolls, from the mid fourteenth century, is a representation of the interior of a syna-

¹⁵ The illustration is part of the initial-word panel for the Song of Songs, depicting King Solomon seated on his throne and pointing to a Torah scroll standing in the ark; B. NARKISS, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts* (Jerusalem 1969), pl. 33.

gogue in the *Sarajevo Haggadah* (Barcelona, second half of the fourteenth century; fig. 5). Three Torah scrolls are shown in the open ark, standing vertically. Combining this with the previously mentioned evidence from the German *maḥazor*, one concludes that by the fourteenth century, at the latest, Torah scrolls were kept in a vertical position in both Franco-Germany and Spain.¹⁶

Presumably, the change in the position in which the scrolls were kept in the ark was decisive for the design of the wrapping; indeed, a vertically standing scroll could not be kept stable solely by means of the staves on which the parchment was wound. Even today, many communities use straps or partitions to hold the scrolls in a stable position.¹⁷ In addition, we may assume that the square *mappah* in which the scroll was wrapped, once or twice, was also inadequate, as it might easily slide down and expose the parchment. It was possibly for this reason that the square *mappah* fell into disuse in the Middle Ages, to be replaced by a long, narrow binder. Winding the binder around the scroll, with both parts held tightly together, helped to stabilize it.

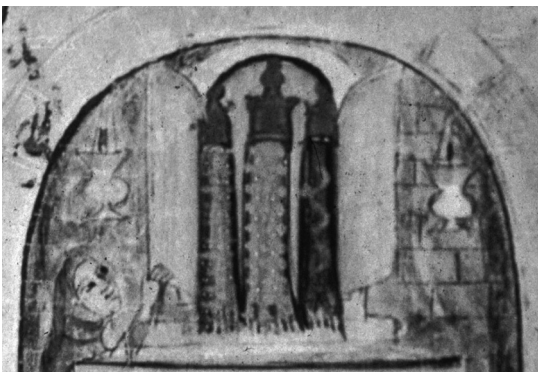


Fig. 5. *Sarajevo Haggadah*, Barcelona, second half of 14th century. Sarajevo, National Library (no siglum).

¹⁶ In Franco-Germany, Torah scrolls were kept horizontally in the ark at least till the twelfth century; this follows from a ruling of Rabbenu Tam (Franco-Germany, ca. 1100-1171) that the *mezuzah* should be affixed in a horizontal position (contrary to the practice in his time) because that was the direction of the Torah scrolls; see *Tosafot*, BT *Menaḥot* 33a, and cf. D. SPERBER, *Jewish Customs: Sources and History*, vol. I (Hebrew; Jerusalem 1989), p. 52. We may therefore date the change in position to the thirteenth century.

¹⁷ Partitions and straps are customarily used in Italian Holy arks to hold the Torah scrolls fast; however, they do not appear in photographs that have been published in the literature.

In Spain, however, other factors seem to have been at work, since another accessory evolved in all communities of the Sephardi Diaspora—and it is still in use today: a long wrapper, of height equal to that of the parchment, wound together with the latter (fig. 6).¹⁸ The details of this accessory were clearly depicted by Bernard Picart in his drawing of the accessories of a Torah scroll in the Portuguese Synagogue of Amsterdam at the beginning of the eighteenth century (fig. 7).¹⁹ On the right of the picture we see a wrapper made of a checkered fabric, wound together with the scroll. In the center is a binder of patterned cloth, wrapped around the scroll from top to bottom and secured by a lace knotted at the bottom of the scroll. This method is common to this day in all Sephardi communities.

The use of the wrapper obviously hampers the handling of Torah scrolls, since its position has to be readjusted in accordance with the part of the scroll being read.²⁰ Moreover, it increases the scroll's weight and makes it more difficult to carry. Clearly, therefore, it must have evolved as the solution to a difficult problem, which justified the inconvenience. Addition of such a large piece of cloth might conceivably have been necessary to pro-



Fig. 6. Torah scroll wrapper wound together with the scroll, Sofia, Bulgaria, 1970s, from: N. STAMPFER & Y. STROM, *A Tree Still Stands: The Last Jews of Eastern Europe* (Spertus Museum, Chicago, 1986) p. 18.

¹⁸ A similar wrapper is characteristic of the Italian Torah scroll; we cannot determine whether the Italian version evolved independently or as a result of Sephardi influence.

¹⁹ For Picart and his work see A. RUBENS, *A Jewish Iconography* (London 1954), pp. 14-24.

²⁰ In order to readjust the wrapper to the current reading of the scroll, the latter had to be opened to an extent of about six meters on a flat surface and the wrapper moved sideways some two meters. Wrapper and scroll were then rewound carefully to avoid unwanted folds in the fabric. Alternatively, Moroccan communities use—to this day—a wrapper as long as the whole Torah scroll, that is, some forty meters; such a wrapper does not have to be moved, since it protects the whole scroll, from beginning to end.

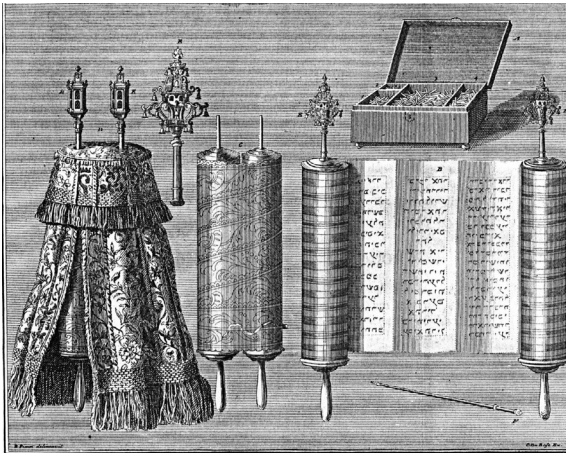


Fig. 7. Wrapper, binder, and mantle for Torah scroll, Amsterdam, beginning of 18th century, engraving by Bernard Picart, from: B. PICART, *The Ceremonies and Religious Customs of the Various Nations of the Known World; Together with Historical Annotations and several Curious Discourses Equally Instructive and Entertaining*, London 1733, Vol. I, opp. p. 232.

tect the parchment from humidity. In fact, the ark in Spanish synagogues undoubtedly presented such problems, being essentially little more than a niche in the wall.²¹ This type of ark is typical of synagogues in medieval Europe, where dampness was an ever-present problem.²² Perhaps it was also dampness that prompted the change in the position of the scrolls in the ark, from horizontal to vertical. Presumably, in vertical position, leaning back diagonally, the scroll had minimum contact with the sides of the ark and was therefore in less danger of absorbing dampness. In addition, the cloth wrapper that was wound together with the scroll, as well as the binder wound several times around the scroll, insulated the parchment from the damp air in the ark. Thus, the Sephardi Torah scroll was secured by two accessories: the rectangular wrap that evolved from the square

²¹ Such as the ark in the *Sarajevo Haggadah* (fig. 5). Another example is the ark in the small synagogue of Cordoba, where niches about forty centimetres deep were made in the eastern wall of the room; see F. CANTERA BURGOS, *Sinagogas Españolas* (Madrid 1984), p. 9.

²² The problem is mentioned, for example, in a responsum by the German scholar R. Yiṣḥaq b. Mošeh (Vienna, ca. 1180-1250) in his book *Or Zaru'a*: "As to what you wrote concerning a structure in the synagogue, which is a stone structure in the eastern wall, that the Torah scrolls placed in it used to spoil because of the ground's dampness, they made a separate wooden ark and took them out of the old [space] and put them in the new one and they are well protected there..." (*Or Zaru'a*, pt. II [Leipzig 1860; fotogr. repr. Jerusalem 1960], no. 386). An example of attempts to solve the problem of humidity in Holy arks may be seen in the "Pinkas" Synagogue, Prague; built at the end of the fifteenth century, this synagogue suffers from excess humidity because of the nearby river. As protection, the inner sides of the ark are lined with metal plates.

miṭpaḥat/mappah, and the binder that fulfilled the same function as “the cords and ribbons in the wraps of books,” since it secured the two parts of the scroll to each other and also properly covered the scroll.

Wraps and binders like those drawn by Picart may be found in all communities of the Sephardi Diaspora. This attests to the fact that the practice of winding a cloth wrap together with the parchment was established in Spain before the Expulsion. Moreover, the descriptions of Torah scrolls in the aforementioned Spanish manuscripts show that the entire system for the storage and protection of Torah scrolls evolved at the latest in the first half of the fourteenth century.²³

From the depictions of Torah scrolls in the *Sarajevo Haggadah* we learn that, as early as the middle of the fourteenth century, Torah scrolls had an outer cover, later known as the *me'il*, “mantle.” The existence of the mantle may also be deduced from references by R. Jacob b. Asher (author of the standard halakhic work *Arba‘ah Turim*), who lived in the first half of the fourteenth century. On one occasion he rules that “it is permitted to make a small *vilon* (= curtain) from a large one, or to make from it a *kis* (= purse, bag) for a Torah scroll.”²⁴ Elsewhere he speaks of a Torah scroll “wrapped in a *miṭpaḥat* and placed in its *tiq* (case).”²⁵ In both cases, the definition of *kis* or *tiq* does not fit the description of a cloth wrapper, but the words clearly refer to some kind of closed accessory, like a bag. R. Jacob’s use of the term *tiq* follows the usual talmudic terminology in a discussion of the ritual accessories used in their times.²⁶ Another example of a cloth mantle is clearly visible in an illustration from the *Barcelona Haggadah* (mid fourteenth century), which shows the

²³ This is an interesting conclusion, insofar as representations of Torah scrolls from fourteenth-century Franco-Germany show only binders. It would seem that the Torah mantle, first reported in central Europe only in the fifteenth century, developed there many years after its first appearance in Spain.

²⁴ *Arba‘ah Turim, Oraḥ Ḥayyim*, sec. 154. The word *vilon* refers here to what was known later as a *paroket*.

²⁵ *Arba‘ah Turim, Yoreh De‘ah*, sec. 282.

²⁶ The issue at hand was the treatment of ritual objects with the proper respect. The major source of the discussion is the Babylonian Talmud, *Megil-lah* 26b. Here, R. Jacob is relying on Maimonides; referring to a situation in which the scroll was “wrapped in a *miṭpaḥat* and placed in its *tiq*,” he quotes Maimonides (*Mišneh Torah, Hil. Tefil-lin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 10:6) *verbatim*, apparently not noticing that the receptacles in which Torah scrolls were kept in Babylonia or Egypt were quite different from the cloth mantles used in his time.



Fig. 8. Raising of the Torah, *Barcelona Haggadah*, Barcelona, Spain, mid 14th century, British Library, Ms. Add. 14761, fol. 65b.

Torah scroll being raised up high (fig. 8).²⁷ This mantle is decorated with an alternating pattern in a diagonal mesh, which was typical of the Italian silk industry in the thirteenth century.²⁸

Both these depictions of the Sephardi Torah mantle document a late stage in its evolution, that is, when the Torah crown was already in place on its top. Of the earlier stage, before the advent of the crown, we have no evidence from Sephardi manuscripts, and for this stage we have to resort to Ashkenazi ones. One of these is the depiction of an open Torah ark in an Ashkenazi *maḥazor* of 1459/60, in which the mantle is seen as a kind of inverted bag, its opening at the bottom.²⁹ The structure of the mantle changed in Spain only after the advent of the Torah crown,³⁰ when open-

²⁷ There is a similar illustration in the *Kaufmann Haggadah* (Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Kaufmann Collection, Ms. A422, fol. 42), also written in Barcelona in the middle of the fourteenth century. However, the original color of the mantle is indistinct, since the color of the illustrations has faded. For a misidentification of these mantles as Torah scroll cases see A. FELLER, "'Purim of Saragossa' and its Implications on the Sephardi Method of Dressing the Torah Scroll," *Jewish Art* 18 (1992), p. 83.

²⁸ See B. MARKOWSKY, *Europäische Seidengewebe des 13.-18. Jahrhunderts* (Köln 1976), p. 118, no. 5.

²⁹ See G. BOTT (ed.), *Siehe der Stein schreit aus der Mauer: Geschichte und Kultur der Juden in Bayern* (Nürnberg 1988), p. 61, no. 3/218.

³⁰ The earliest references to Torah crowns in Spain appear in Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarḥi, *Sefer ha-Manhig* (Jerusalem 1978), no. 56 (referring to Toledo, 1204); R. Solomon

ings were made in its upper part; the same change later occurred in the Ashkenazi mantle as well.

At first, Torah crowns were fashioned as high structures, imitating the appearance of crowns in general in the Christian world of the Middle Ages.³¹ This made it necessary to create a stable flat surface that could support the crown, both inside the ark and, when the scroll was taken out and carried from place to place. This function was fulfilled by a rigid top, made of a wooden board. The board was covered with cloth and a rectangular or trapezoid cloth was sewn around it. In order to secure the board to the top of the scroll, two holes were made in it, through which the staves on which the scroll was wound could protrude. This also prompted the making of the first finials, since the tops of the staves, which had to pass through the holes, were too large and had to be removed. Thus the ornamented tops that were once integral parts of the staves became separate, independent items—the finials. The aforementioned illustration from the *Sarajevo Haggadah* (fig. 5), in which the scrolls are shown with crowns, thus represents the second stage in the evolution of the Sephardi mantle—a mantle with openings for the staves.

The same illustration also furnishes information about the type of fabric and the finish of the lower edge of the mantle. Although the illustration is quite small,³² the artist meticulously depicted the patterns on the fabrics. The right-hand scroll features a wavelike strip on a green background; the central one has a pattern of orange-colored diagonal lines combined with yellow squares; and the left-hand scroll has alternating yellow lines and lines of gold dots on a blue background. These patterns are known to have been used in the fourteenth century in two types of costly fabric: in brocade weaves, or in embroidered silk imitating brocade patterns.³³ At

Adret, *Responsa* (attr. Nahmanides; Warsaw 1884, photogr. repr. Jerusalem 1970), no. 260 (referring to Barcelona, late thirteenth or early fourteenth century).

³¹ On the design of a crown commissioned by the community of Arles, Avignon, in 1439, shaped like an architectural wall, see V. B. MANN (ed.), *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts* (Cambridge 2000), pp. 111–114. On the depiction of the Torah crowns in the *Sarajevo Haggadah*, see: B. YANIV, “The Torah Crown in Spain -- An Attempt Reconstruction,” *Tarbiz* LXXIV no. 3 (April–June 2005), pp. 423–439.

³² The whole mantle is only 22 mm high in the illustration.

³³ Brocade is a patterned silk material which was extremely expensive in the Middle Ages. In the fourteenth century it was manufactured only in Italy, so that as far as Spain was concerned, brocade had to be imported. Because of the high cost of this material, its patterns were often imitated in embroidery. About the costly and precious fabrics of the

any rate, this illustration indicates that in Barcelona, and perhaps also in other parts of Spain, mantles for Torah scrolls were made of patterned materials. Of course, it may be assumed that some mantles were made of plain materials, which were cheaper than patterned ones. Another item shown in the same illustration, carefully drawn by the artist, is the line of tassels around the lower edges of the mantles, represented by thin lines. Summarizing, then, we have seen that the Spanish mantle consisted of a rigid top with two holes in it, covered with cloth with tassels along the lower hem. These features are part of the prototype of the Sephardi mantle, and they are typical of Torah mantles in Sephardi communities to this day. In time, however, an additional feature of the prototype evolved, namely, an opening in the front, that is, on the side of the script in the scroll (fig. 1).³⁴ The characteristic features of the textile wrappings of the Spanish Torah scroll were thus the use of a wrapper around the parchment itself, and the design of the mantle, open in front, with a rigid top. These features distinguish the wrapping of the Sephardi Torah scroll from its Ashkenazi counterpart, which lacks the wrapper and is moreover made of two rectangular pieces of material, open at the bottom.

After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, the refugees brought the prototype wrapping of the Torah scroll with them to their new countries. Wherever they settled, the Torah scroll accessories continued to evolve, absorbing local characteristics. Unfortunately, as far as the Balkans—the region around which this discussion is centered—is concerned, there are no surviving examples of such accessories dated earlier than the nineteenth century, and even that sparse inventory was lost owing to the destruction of Jewish communities in that part of the world during World War II. The present discussion will therefore focus on the Sephardi

Torah mantles in Spain see: M. SERRANO Y SANZ, "Inventario de alhajas y otros efectos que pertenecían a las sinagogas de Zaragoza cuando la expulsión de los judíos," *Boletín de la Real Academia Española* 3 (1916), pp. 362-365 that publishes a document later on commented by M.A. MOTIS DOLADER, "Estudio de los objetos litúrgicos de las sinagogas zaragozanas embargados por la Corona en el año 1492," *Aragón en la Edad Media: Estudios de Economía y Sociedad* 6 (1984), 247-262, adding new information on pp. 259-260. I am grateful to Mr. Javier Castaño, who directed me to these articles.

³⁴ Although we have no visual evidence of this prototype from Spain, there is no doubt that the opening was indeed developed in the front before the expulsion, since Torah scrolls all over the Sephardi Diaspora attest to this feature. This is typical not only of Torah mantles from the Balkans, but also of Sephardi communities in Morocco, Algiers and Italy, as well as the Portuguese Diaspora in Holland (fig. 7).

communities in Turkey, where Torah scroll accessories have survived till the present; we shall consider the tradition of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As in Spain, the Torah mantle of the Balkans was made of patterned cloth, sewn around a rigid top with two holes; a line of tassels graced the lower edge of the mantle. Wrapped around the scroll beneath the mantle was a wrapper of the same height as the parchment, and the scroll was further secured by a narrow cloth binder wound around it from top to bottom. At the end of the binder, a lace (sometimes doubled) was tied around the scroll.

All these items are known in Sephardi rabbinical literature by the general term *mappah*, so it is sometimes difficult to know which item is being alluded to: the wrapper, the binder or the mantle. One example of the confusion may be found in a responsum by R. David b. Solomon ibn Zimra, a refugee from Spain, written in 1514, when he was officiating as a rabbi in Egypt. Asked a question concerning the dedication of ritual objects brought to the Land of Israel from the Diaspora by an emissary, he refers first to “the *me’ilim* (= mantles) and the *mitpaḥat*” but later on in the same responsum to “*mappot* and *paroḳet* (= Torah ark curtain?).”³⁵ It is not clear whether by *mitpaḥat* he means an object associated with the mantle and used to wrap the scroll; but if that was his intention, why did he mention the *mappot*? Another example comes from *Avqat Rokel*, a volume of responsa by R. Yosef Caro (1488-1575), which refers to the making of “Torah scrolls, *mappah* and *tapuḥim*.”³⁶ This reference seems to consider the *mappah* the main object used to wrap the scroll; that might be the outer wrapper, or perhaps the mantle, which was a highly visible object in that period. From the same period we have a reference in a responsum by R. Yosef ibn Lev (Turkey, sixteenth century) to a person who dedicated “a Torah scroll and *mappot* and finials”;³⁷ the term *mappot*, in the plural, presumably refers to several items, including most probably the mantle (which, as we have pointed out, was the most obvious part of the outer accoutrements of the scroll). In what follows, however, I shall adhere to the clearly defined terminology adopted above: wrapper, binder and mantle.³⁸

³⁵ David b. Zimra, *Responsa* (Warsaw 1882; fotogr. repr. Jerusalem 1972), pt. II, no. 644.

³⁶ Yosef Caro, *Avqat Rokel* (Leipzig 1851; photog. repr. Jerusalem 1960), no. 74.

³⁷ Yosef b. Lev, *Responsa* (Amsterdam 1624; fotogr. repr. Jerusalem 1970), pt. III, no. 122.

³⁸ These terms (Hebrew: *yeri’ah*, *avnet*, *me’il*) have been standardized for scholarly

STORAGE OF THE SEPHARDI TORAH SCROLL IN THE BALKANS

As in any part of the Diaspora, the outward appearance of the Torah scroll in the Balkans presented, so to speak, a portrait of the economic, social and spiritual state of the community. The most obvious feature of this portrait is the material of which the accessories used to wrap and secure the scroll were made—elaborate, costly textiles. This was most probably a reflection of the situation in Spain before the Expulsion, since all the accessories used for this purpose in the Sephardi Diaspora reveal the emphasis on costly fabrics, unlike the situation in Franco-Germany and Central Europe, where the emphasis was on iconographic motives and dedicatory inscriptions. With this emphasis on the aesthetic aspect of ritual objects, it was quite natural that the costly materials selected for wrapping Torah scrolls were those available to the Jewish community. These were primarily patterned silk fabrics, which were frequently a major item of Jewish trade in the local market;³⁹ also common were embroidered fabrics that had been used for some other purpose in well-to-do homes.

Analysis of Torah scroll accessories in the Balkan communities indicates that the selection of previously used fabrics was a common and even characteristic phenomenon. While such secondary use of used material was known to some extent in all Jewish communities,⁴⁰ in the Balkans it was practically the rule. Thus one finds reused objects such as bedspreads and pillowcases, as well as the *bohças*⁴¹ with which women bound their

work by the Centre for Jewish Art, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, in view of the unsystematic use of the term *mappah* in rabbinical literature; see B. YANIV, Z. HANEGBI and S. SABAR, *Hebrew Inscriptions and their Translations* (Jerusalem 1988), p. 7.

³⁹ For the Jewish silk trade see H. INALCIK, "Jews in the Ottoman Economy and Finances, 1450–1500," in *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis*, ed. C. E. BOSWORTH et al. (Princeton, NJ 1989), p. 523; J. HACKER, "The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th to 18th Centuries," in *The Sephardi Jewish Diaspora after the Expulsion*, ed. M. Abitbol, J. Hacker et al. (Hebrew; Jerusalem 1992), p. 58; E. BENBASSA & A. RODRIGUE, *The Jews of the Balkans: The Judeo-Spanish Community, 15th to 20th Centuries* (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA 1995), p. 43.

⁴⁰ For this phenomenon in Galicia see B. YANIV, "Ceremonial Textiles for the Synagogue," in *Treasures of Jewish Galicia: Judaica from the Museum of Ethnography and Crafts in Lvov, Ukraine*, ed. S. Harel Hoshen (Tel Aviv 1996), pp. 101–107.

⁴¹ The *bohça* is a square cloth made in different sizes, used to wrap things to be either carried or stored. For embroidered *bohças* in Muslim Turkish society see L. MACKIE, "Rugs and Textiles," in *Turkish Art*, ed. Esin Atil (New York 1980), pp. 365–368; P. JOHNSTONE, *Turkish Embroidery* (London 1985), pp. 9–11.

personal belongings when leaving home. These were regular items in a woman's dowry,⁴² and she and her family would use them for years before dedicating them to the synagogue. Such embroidered items, professionally manufactured in local workshops, first appeared in Jewish bourgeois homes in the second half of the nineteenth century. The embroidery was done with gilt silver thread on a foundation of cardboard cutout patterns, and the patterns themselves were adapted to the shape and design of the object. Such costly items were highly appreciated by their users, who therefore chose them when they wished to make a particularly fine donation to the synagogue: Torah ark curtains, covers for the reader's desk (*tevah*) and, in particular, Torah scroll mantles.

This practice, though not strictly sanctioned by Jewish law, spread throughout Sephardi synagogues in Turkey and other Balkan communities, and when members of those communities immigrated to Israel and established new synagogues there, these fabrics, originating in personal, domestic effects, continued to assume new functions in a ritual context. It is interesting to examine rabbinical views in this connection. The legal point of departure for the reuse of ritual objects is the following rule from the Babylonian Talmud: "As the altar [in the Temple] has not been used by a layman, so the wood and the fire [for the altar] shall not have been used by a layman" (BT, *Menaḥot* 22a). In other words, all sacred utensils must be made from materials intended from the start for that purpose. The more stringent halakhic authorities drew an analogy between the Temple and the synagogue, on that basis prohibiting the use of any material that had previously seen use for secular purposes; this was all the more so with regard to women's effects. Nevertheless, some rabbis, in an effort to take the feelings of their flock into consideration, relied on the halakhic principle that "what is holy we may raise [to a higher degree of sanctity] but not bring down" (BT, *Menaḥot* 39a). Thus, R. Ya'ir Ḥayyim Bacharach (Germany, seventeenth century), discussing his predecessor R. Jacob Moellin's prohibition (fifteenth century) on the conversion of clothing into ritual objects,⁴³ suggested that such conversion be permitted, provided the shape of the original object was modified.⁴⁴

⁴² See at length E. JUHASZ, *The Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire: Chapters in their Material Culture* (Hebrew; Jerusalem 1989), pp. 65-119

⁴³ *Sefer Maharil*, ed. S. Y. SPITZER (Jerusalem 1989), no. 114.

⁴⁴ Ya'ir Ḥ. BACHARACH, *Havat Ya'ir* (Lemberg 1894), no. 161. Bacharach's major

These Ashkenazi rulings, issued in the late Middle Ages, were known to the contemporary Sephardi rabbis who had to deal with the problem. Thus, R. Yosef Caro, in his commentary on *Arba 'ah Turim*, cites Moellin's objections, but we have no evidence that the question was ever presented to him in practice.⁴⁵ He does not treat the subject at all in his responsa *Avqat Rokel* or in his basic work, *Shulḥan 'Aruk*. Neither is the issue considered by other rabbis. There are two possible reasons. First, possibly, the problem of secondary use came up only in the nineteenth century, when expensive gold embroidery made its appearance in Jewish homes. Second, Sephardi rabbis may have been more permissive in this connection than their Ashkenazi counterparts, so that the problem is not reflected in Sephardi rabbinic literature from the Balkans. The latter seems to be the more plausible reason, since costly fabrics were in personal use before the nineteenth century as well,⁴⁶ and the need to dedicate personal effects is just one aspect of human nature.⁴⁷

A question brought before R. Jacob b. Abraham Argoiti, chief rabbi of Turkish Jewry in the 1940s, clarifies the situation as to the manufacture of mantles from reused materials. The responsum, published in Argoiti's responsa *Yerek Ya'aqov*, is concerned with the purchase of a Muslim woman's gold-embroidered dress to make a Torah ark curtain.⁴⁸ While the sanctity of the curtain is less than that of the mantle, and one should not infer from the rabbi's lenient ruling that he would rule similarly for a mantle, the sequence and structure of his arguments is indicative of how Sephardi rabbis in Turkey treated the issue of ritual accessories made from reused textiles. He first cites prooftexts for the principle that a synagogue possesses a lesser degree of sanctity than the Temple, so that the law relating to the Temple utensils should not be applied to ritual objects

source for this ruling was the biblical story of the women who donated their brass mirrors to help build the Tabernacle in the desert (Exodus 38:8 as interpreted in *Midrash Tanḥuma Pequde*, para. 9).

⁴⁵ Yosef CARO, *Bet Yosef, Oraḥ Ḥayyim*, sec. 153:21-22.

⁴⁶ For a Jewish woman's dress made of patterned material, from 1568, see JUHASZ, *Sephardi Jews*, p. 125, fig. 7

⁴⁷ In many cases, the donation of a piece of clothing is the result of a vow made in distress. Such actions are common in other cultures as well; for example, clothing was regularly donated to Christian churches for the preparation of sacred vestments.

⁴⁸ Jacob A. ARGOITI, *Yerek Ya'aqov, Oraḥ Ḥayyim*, no. 1. I am indebted to Dov Cohen of the Ben-Zvi Institute, who drew my attention to this source.

for synagogal use. He goes on to cite examples of forbidden and permitted situations, focusing on the question of modifying the form of the fabric, as discussed by R. Ya'ir Bacharach, with examples of permitted objects from various communities. In the final analysis, he permits purchase of the dress. The responsum is concerned with an exceptional case, since the garment in question belonged to a Muslim woman and therefore the case was not one of a Jew dedicating a used object to the synagogue. Since the rabbi saw fit to permit the conversion in that case, he surely would have permitted the dedication of a dress or other domestic article belonging to a Jewish donor.

THE WRAPPER

Despite the term *mappah* used for all three accessories, the cloth wrapper seems to have been called *yeri'ah* as early as the sixteenth century. An early reference occurs in a question addressed to R. Joseph b. Moses Trani (1568-1639), principal of the Constantinople *yeshiva* at the beginning of the seventeenth century and later chief rabbi of Turkey. The question mentions that the cantor “raised the Torah scroll from the *bimah* wound in a *yeri'ah*, in order to bind it...”⁴⁹ The *yeri'ah* is mentioned in a question addressed in the twentieth century to the aforementioned Rabbi Argoiti, who distinguishes in his responsum between the *yeri'ah* and what he calls the *mappah*, namely, the binder.⁵⁰ In recent times, the Sephardi *yeri'ah* in the Balkans was generally made of plain cloth, of a single color, or perhaps with simple woven or printed patterns such as stripes, squares or flowers.⁵¹ However, it may be assumed that in the

⁴⁹ Joseph b. Moses Trani *Responsa* (Lemberg 1861; photogr. repr. 1959), pt. I, no. 136, s.v. *Ha-she'elah...*

⁵⁰ ARGOITI, *Yerek Ya'aqov, Oraḥ Ḥayyim*, no. 2. The question was as follows: “I have been asked of a certain Torah scroll, whose *yeri'ah*, which is wound around it ...[?] so as not to touch the bare parchment, is slightly worn, and it is desired to put it in another Torah scroll whose *yeri'ah* is new, and to exchange it, because...” That the rabbi uses the term *mappah* for the binder may be deduced from another responsum, which also uses the term *fascia*, see below, n. 58.

⁵¹ Among wrappers documented in 1985 from the collection of the Dubrovnik (Ragusa) Jewish community there is a white cotton wrapper (Jerusalem Index of Jewish Art, Centre for Jewish Art, Jerusalem [hereafter: IJA]: Dubrovnik, no. 9b), as well as a cotton wrapper with a woven striped pattern (*ibid.*, no. 13). A striped pattern also appears

early centuries of Spanish-Jewish settlement in the Balkans the wrappers were made of light-colored linen. Linen, being readily available and inexpensive, both in Europe and in the Balkans,⁵² was used in Europe to make Torah binders—witness Italian and Ashkenazi binders preserved in synagogues since the sixteenth century.

The assumption that early wrappers in the Balkans were also made of linen is based on the existence of Italian linen wrappers from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.⁵³ Further corroboration is provided by sixteenth-century linen wrappers belonging to the Jewish community of Dubrovnik (Ottoman Ragusa).⁵⁴ Each of these wrappers, measuring respectively 53 by 290 cm, 58 by 300 cm and 57 by 350 cm, is made of four or eight rectangular pieces of cloth joined together by strips of lace, or by hidden stitches concealed by strips of bobbin lace made of linen thread.⁵⁵ This composition of the wrappers is identical with that of the early wrappers preserved in the Rome Jewish community, naturally prompting the question as to whether these wrappers might be Italian. It is indeed possible that they were brought to Ragusa by Italian families that settled there; but it is also conceivable that they were made in Ragusa under the influence of Italian tradition. The latter possibility emerges from a comparison of the lace strips of these wrappers with those of the Italian wrappers, which reveal both different patterns and styles, and significantly different dimensions, perhaps indicating a local (Ragusan) design. In fact, this technique of bobbin lace was a local type of

on a wrapper photographed in 1983 in the *Etz Hayyim* Synagogue, Istanbul. See JUHASZ, *Sephardi Jews*, p. 94, fig. 35. For a checkered pattern in a Torah scroll wrapper in the Zion Synagogue, Sofia (Bulgaria), see N. STAMPFER & Y. STROM, *A Tree Still Stands: The Last Jews of Eastern Europe* (Spertus Museum, Chicago, 1986), p. 18.

⁵² The cotton that was imported into the region in recent generations was more expensive and less available than the local linen.

⁵³ The collection of the Jewish community of Rome includes fifteen linen wrappers, the earliest dated 1593 (Rome, Jewish Museum, no. 1066); most of them are from the seventeenth century. Since all these wrappers have dedicatory inscriptions, that seems to be the main reason for their preservation. In three of them, in fact, only the inscribed part of the wrapper has been preserved (Rome, Jewish Museum, nos. 1068, 1073, 1080).

⁵⁴ M. GUŠIĆ, "Some Textile Specimens in the Collection of the Synagogue of the Jewish Community in Dubrovnik," *Zbornik* 1 (Beograd 1971), p. 336. Jews from Spain and southern Italy settled in Ragusa in the sixteenth century, and the community has preserved early ritual objects attesting to the early Sephardi heritage.

⁵⁵ According to community tradition, the names inscribed on them in ink are those of the donating families: Termi, Maestro, Russ (*Ibid.*, p. 336).

lace as early as the end of the fifteenth century, and it is actually known as *point de Raguse*.⁵⁶ In sum, therefore, it would appear that the linen wrappers in the collection of the Dubrovnik Jewish community, dated to the fifteenth or sixteenth century, reflect early Sephardi tradition in the western part of the Ottoman Empire and perhaps also the use of linen wrappers in other parts of the empire. In time, as cotton textiles came into use in the Balkans and in Europe in general, linen wrappers gave way to cotton ones, which may be seen even today in Turkish synagogues.

THE BINDER

The binder wound around the Torah scroll above the cloth wrapper is known in rabbinical literature as *mappah*,⁵⁷ but in most locations it also had another name in the vernacular. Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire use the Latin term *fascia*, meaning a long strip of cloth.⁵⁸ Characteristic of the Sephardi Torah binder is the use of a costly material with a lining, but with no inscription or other personal indication; in most cases the outer end was shaped like a triangle, with a long ribbon for securing the binder.

Binders may be of different sizes. In width they vary between 10 and 24 cm, and in length from 78 to 260 cm; this data is indicative of considerable diversity and nonuniformity. The lack of uniformity is a consequence of the fact that most binders are “recycled” pieces of material used previously for some other purpose, so that the size of the binder is largely a function of the size of the original object. These constraints seem to have limited the length of binders, most of which are at most 200 cm long—much shorter than the average Italian binder, which could measure as long as 300 cm.

⁵⁶ See P. EARNSHAW, *A Dictionary of Lace* (Aylesbury 1982), p. 139.

⁵⁷ As noted above, the same term was also used in rabbinical literature for the wrapper and the mantle. We therefore prefer the general term “binder” for this particular accessory.

⁵⁸ For the term *fascia* among the Sephardi Jews of the Ottoman Empire see JUHASZ, *Sephardi Jews*, p. 75; see also *Yerek Ya'aqov, Oraḥ Hayyim*, no. 55 (where the term *fascia* is used for the *mitpaḥat*). The term is also used by the Italian Jews; see D. LISCIA BEMPORAD, “Argenti e tessuti rituali a Livorno,” in *La nazione ebraica di Livorno: Itinerari di vita*, ed. I. KAHN & D. LISCIA BEMPORAD (Livorno 1992), p. 95. The term used for the binder in Germany was *Wimpel*, an Old German word meaning a long piece of cloth.

All the more surprising, therefore, is the considerable length of the ribbons attached to the outer end of the binder; the longest of these ribbons seem to belong to the shortest binders.⁵⁹ This is presumably because of the need to make up for the shorter length, since the combined length of binder and ribbon helped to keep the Torah scroll securely bound.

The materials used for binders are different, as are the techniques and style of manufacture, with no common denominator of any significance. Based on the material documented over the past two decades in the larger urban centers of Turkey, the following groups of textiles have been identified:⁶⁰

1. Binders made of patterned silk, cotton or wool (fig. 9).⁶¹ This group in turn falls into two subgroups. One consists of fabrics featuring striped patterns running the length of the binder, with the pattern thus adapted to the structure of the object. Binders were made of several pieces, and since striped patterns are woven in the direction of the warp, such binders were obviously made by cutting a short piece of fabric into strips along the warp and attaching the strips together along the lines of the woof, thus producing a continuously striped binder. The strips were attached by manual stitching, concealing the attached edges in the lining, which was made of linen or cotton satin. Even when the binder was sewn together from small strips, including diagonal ones, the direction of the strips was adapted to the direction of the binder.⁶² In some binders of this group, a decorative strip or cord was sewn along the edges of the binder. The cord of tassels in the binder shown in fig. 9 also contains sequins. The second subgroup includes fabrics in patterns that do not fit the structure of the binder, such as Paisley or geometric patterns.⁶³

⁵⁹ An example is a binder from Izmir, 110 cm long, whose ribbon is 193 cm long (Israel Museum, 150/211).

⁶⁰ This sample makes no claim to numerical reliability, since that aspect cannot be analyzed without comprehensive documentation of all available material. At the same time, the sample represents the groups of binders within the totality of the material available in the Israel Museum and in the relevant Israeli synagogues, as well as material documented in Bulgaria, Romania, former Yugoslavia and Turkey, mainly Izmir. A few published binders were also included.

⁶¹ For example see also: Israel Museum, nos. 150/128, 150/214, 150/221, 150/212, 150/218, 150/219, 150/208; see also JUHASZ, *Sephardi Jews*, pl. 10, the two top binders.

⁶² For example: Israel Museum, no. 150/221—a brocade binder with a pattern of stripes and rows of flowers; the four strips are cut diagonally.

⁶³ For example: Israel Museum, nos. 150/146, 150/211.

2. Silk binders with silver embroidery. Some binders of this group are made of velvet, with gold embroidery on a cardboard foundation. Other popular materials are satin, with various types of embroidery in silver and silk thread.⁶⁴ Among the embroidery techniques used for the latter are satin stitch embroidery, raised embroidery on padding, and lamella embroidery.⁶⁵ These types of embroidery reflect different techniques, some professional and some amateur; they are characteristic of local traditions of embroidery in rich clothing and domestic design. The binder shown in fig. 10a is made of ten pieces of velvet as seen in the drawing (fig. 10b); analysis of their shapes shows that they originated in an elegant woman's dress.⁶⁶ In this group of binders there is no connection between the embroidered pattern and the rectangular cut of the binder: the floral motives are cut off by the binder's edges. This is a good example of a binder made of randomly chosen material.

3. Linen binders embroidered with silk thread. Such binders were made from a rectangular piece of linen, embroidered with silk thread.⁶⁷ This type of embroidery is characteristic of Turkish folk embroidery; a more delicate version may be seen in towels and scarves.⁶⁸

Summarizing this survey of binder materials, we note that those made of straight pieces were either fashioned from new fabrics or used pieces of large objects such as rectangular bedcovers, tablecloths or wall-coverings; while those put together from rounded or diagonal pieces usually originated in clothing. As we shall see below, the materials used for Torah mantles came from similar sources.

⁶⁴ Velvet: Israel Museum, nos. 150/140, 150/145 (fig. 10); silk: 150/141, 150/196, 150/217, 150/220, 150/223; see also JUHASZ, *Sephardi Jews*, pl. 10, first and third binders from bottom.

⁶⁵ Lamella is a flat silver thread, embroidered on the material by using an additional thread, without going through to the back of the material.

⁶⁶ For such dresses see: JUHASZ, *Sephardi Jews*, p. 80, fig. 18; p. 212, fig. 17; p. 213, fig. 18.

⁶⁷ Israel Museum, no. 150/213; for an illustration see JUHASZ, *Sephardi Jews*, pl. 10, second binder from bottom.

⁶⁸ For towels of this kind see: JOHNSTONE, *Turkish Embroidery*, p. 11; M. GENTLES, *Turkish and Greek Islands Embroidery from the Burton Yost Berry Collection in the Art Institute of Chicago* (Chicago 1964), pp. 11-13.

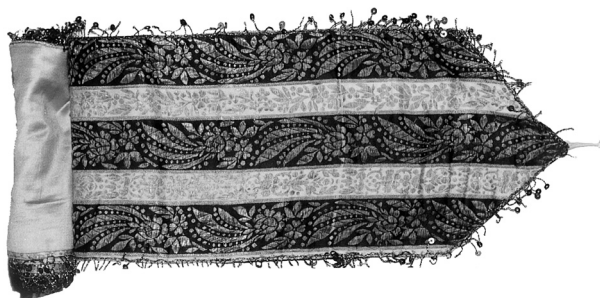


Fig. 9. Torah scroll binder, Izmir, 20th century, cotton, 153 by 20 cm. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, no. 150/228.

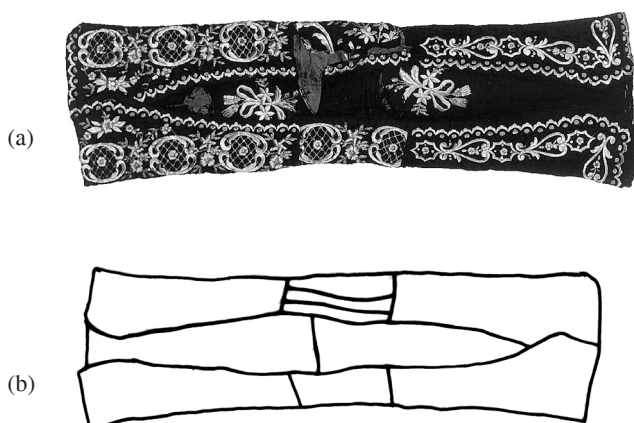


Fig. 10. Torah scroll binder, Kuzguncuk, Istanbul, 20th century, purple silk velvet, gilt silver thread embroidery on cardboard, 78 by 24 cm. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, no. 150/145.

THE MANTLE

The only terms used in rabbinical literature of the Middle Ages to refer to the outer accoutrements of Torah scrolls are *mappah* and *mitṭpaḥat*; the term “mantle” (Heb. *me’il*) was clearly not current among Sephardi rabbis in the Balkans, and the sparsity of references to the Torah scroll and its accessories in any case prevents any definite conclusion as to the pre-

ferred term. We note that when the Jewish refugees from Spain reached the Balkans with their Torah scroll accessories, the objects used for the same purpose by the Romaniot Jews were quite different—wooden Torah cases and the *mitṭpaḥat*.⁶⁹ It is in this light that one should understand a responsum written by R. Elijah Mizraḥi (known as the *Re'em*), of the Constantinople Romaniot community, who referred to the mantle as a *simlah*, namely, a “garment.”⁷⁰ At the time—the first half of the sixteenth century—R. Yosef Caro was using the term *me'il*,⁷¹ but the more common term among the Sephardi Jews of the Balkans was the Spanish word *vestido*, meaning “garment” or piece of clothing in general.

Any discussion of the types of Sephardi Torah mantle is complicated by two factors. First, we have no early mantles that might enable us to reconstruct the early tradition. Second, the formerly Spanish communities dispersed over a very wide geographical region in the Balkans. This dispersion only naturally led to the evolution of different types of mantle. Such is the case for the Sephardi communities of Greece, the various parts of what later became Yugoslavia (Serbia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, Macedonia), Romania and Bulgaria, which were liberated from the Ottoman Sultan's yoke in the course of the nineteenth century. European influences slowly penetrated these areas, and they are clearly evident in mantles dating from the first half of the twentieth century. We shall therefore confine our attention to the Sephardi Torah mantle in Turkey, with particular attention to a collection of early mantles from Dubrovnik.

The Sephardi mantle was made of two parts: a rigid top, and the mantle proper, a kind of robe sewn around the top and suspended from it. Until recently, the mantle had its opening in front—the side revealed when the Torah ark was opened, which is also the written side of the parchment. The direction of the opening, toward the front, was originally the same in all communities of the Sephardi Diaspora, but changes that took place in the design of the mantle in the twentieth century also led to a change in the location of the open-

⁶⁹ The Romaniot Jews were the original inhabitants of the Balkans; as in all communities of the Eastern Mediterranean, they kept their Torah scrolls in wooden cases. About the Romaniot Torah cases see: YANIV, *Torah Case*, pp. 126, 194-195.

⁷⁰ “... for there is a Torah scroll *simlah* on the parchment and even the Rabbis agree that it is a sacred object...” (R. Elijah Mizraḥi, *Responsa* [Jerusalem 1938] no. 49, s.v. *kol ze*).

⁷¹ “Similarly, a *me'il* in which a Torah scroll was wrapped once...” (*Bet Yosef*, para. 259, s.v. *pirte rimze*).

ing. Today one finds in Turkish synagogues Torah mantles opening in front alongside others opening in the back.⁷² The reasons for this situation will be discussed in detail below.

As stated, the common denominator of Sephardi Torah mantles all over the Ottoman Empire is the overall structure, featuring a top and a robe. The circular, rigid top is made of a wooden board,⁷³ about 2 cm thick, with two holes, symmetric with respect to the center, bored in it for the staves of the scroll. The board is covered with the same fabric as that of the robe, generally in the same pattern. Since the Torah crown and finials could be placed firmly and stably on the top, this was the main feature in the design of the mantle.⁷⁴ The upper hem of the square, rectangular or trapezoid robe is gathered around the top and stitched together there. The whole mantle is then placed over the Torah scroll in such a way that the staves project through the holes in the top. This description of the Torah mantle is valid for Sephardi communities in all parts of the Ottoman Empire. The differences between different types of mantle relate mainly to the materials used, the style of their decoration, and the dedicatory inscription on the mantle. These elements also characterize the differences between old and new Turkish mantles.

The following survey of the three different groups of Torah mantles, classified according to types of material, decoration and inscription, is based on a selection of mantles from the main cities.⁷⁵

⁷² For photographs of mantles opening in the front, on Torah scrolls in the *hekal*, see JUHASZ, *Sephardi Jews*, p. 94, fig. 35; Israel Museum, Ethnography, no. 3057 (*Etz Hayyim* Synagogue, Izmir); E. MITRANI & E. ALOK, *Anatolian Synagogues* (Istanbul 1992), p. 158 (*Shalom* Synagogue, Izmir; the illustration shows two mantles opening in the front and two presumably opening in the back); *ibid.*, p. 166. See also I. KARMI, *Jewish Sites of Istanbul* (Istanbul 1992), after p. 44.

⁷³ One also finds hard cardboard used for the purpose, particularly in Torah scrolls from Greece. The group of Greek mantles included in our sample is kept in the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw. These mantles reached Poland together with Greek Jews sent to the death camps in World War II. Lacking a complete picture of Torah mantles from Greece, we cannot determine why cardboard was used instead of wood; we can only assume that it had something to do with European influence in Greece during the nineteenth century.

⁷⁴ This is particularly evidence in Torah mantles of the Jewish community of Rome and the Portuguese community in Holland, in which an additional layer of fabric –the “cape”– has been added around the rigid top, as well as layers of tasseled cords. See Picart (fig. 7); J. C. E. BELINFANTE, *Jewish Historical Museum* (Amsterdam 1978), p. 35.

⁷⁵ See above, n. 60.

1. The mantles of the first group are made of materials with patterns forming a uniform, continuous field; characteristic of such materials, which include various silks such as brocade and damask, and recently also cotton, are all over patterns of identical motifs recurring in a fixed, uniform, sequence, with no particular focus. This is the earliest group of mantles, and its earliest examples come from the Dubrovnik community.⁷⁶ One such mantle is made of gray brocade, with a pattern of branches bearing pink, green, blue and white flowers. The robe is trapezoid in shape, with a tasseled cord around the hem; a thick cord, ending in a tassel, hangs down the back.⁷⁷ The continuous design, typical of the mantles in this group, is also characteristic of mantles in other communities of the Sephardi Diaspora. The use of patterned material did not permit the development of a dedicatory inscription or a pronounced focus of the design; hence the only focus, which remained the same over the years, was the opening of the mantle, i.e., the ornamented hem with its tassels. The back of this particular mantle is emphasized by the colorful cord, which is unique to the mantles of the Dubrovnik community.

2. A second group includes mantles made of a reused monochrome material with gold embroidery. Such mantles were prepared from objects used previously for some other purpose, such as *bohças*, dresses, tablecloths and various covers. They were made of embroidered silk, wool or, in the nineteenth century, mainly silk or cotton velvet. However, the elaborate embroidered patterns did not always fit the design of the Torah mantle. The patterns embroidered on square *bohças* and rectangular tops are organized around the hems and directed inward to the center; whereas those of dresses are organized vertically, along an axis in the front or the rear, with allowance for the neck opening, the shape of the sleeves and the lower hem. A Torah mantle, however, needs a trapezoid sheet of material, with a pattern emphasizing the front opening.

⁷⁶ The connection between the Jews of Dubrovnik and brocade materials may be deduced from their involvement in the international trade through the port of that city; Dubrovnik Jews formed a connecting link between the Balkans and the Mediterranean countries, particularly Italy (J. TADIĆ, "The Role of the Jews of Dubrovnik," *Zbornik 1* [Beograd 1971], p. 8). Silk fabrics formed a major component of this trade (H. GERBER, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th Centuries: Economics and Society* [Hebrew; Jerusalem 1983], pp. 8-67).

⁷⁷ Some mantles have three tasseled cords: IJA: Yugoslavia, mantles, no. III (269).

Nevertheless, this group of mantles is the largest of all, indicating that the desire to dedicate a personal item to the synagogue prevailed over its suitability for that purpose. Artisans made every effort to adapt the existing embroidered patterns to the cut of the Torah mantle. A typical example of a Torah mantle made from a *bohça* is one dedicated by Me'ir b. Yosef of Istanbul (fig. 11). The upper hem of the robe was gathered and stitched to the top, and a brief dedicatory inscription was added at the bottom of the rear. The square-shaped *bohça* was used up entirely for the robe, so that the top had to be covered with an additional piece of material. The advantage of the square shape was that it was of the right size for a Torah mantle and thus did not need to be cut. However, the square shape was not immediately suitable for use as a mantle, so that the upper edge had to be gathered. Another feature of this group is that the multiplicity of patterns and the fact that their original organization clashed with the overall design of the mantle made it difficult to add an inscription. This explains the lack (or brevity, as in the present case) of dedicatory inscriptions in the mantles of this group.

Another possibility available to the designer of a mantle was to use material from a large object, such as a dress, creating a trapezoid shape so



Fig. 11. Torah scroll mantle, Istanbul, 20th century, length: 86 cm, upper width: 85 cm, lower width: 86 cm, diameter: 21 cm. Purple cotton velvet and gilt silver thread embroidery. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, no. 151/151. (a) front; (b) rear.

that there would be no need to gather the upper hem around the top, while at the same time there would be sufficient material at the bottom. We have numerous examples of this type, one a Torah mantle made from a purple dress (fig. 12a). The robe of this mantle consists of thirteen pieces sewn together; since the velvet material was already worn,⁷⁸ the artisan used only the embroidered pieces. Three additional pieces of the same dress were used to cover the top (fig. 12b). To attach the fabric to the wooden board, the designer used round-headed nails and reinforced the holes for the staves with leather strips. An interesting example is a mantle from Anatolia, whose donor's name—Me'ir Marabint—is embroidered around the upper hem (fig. 13a). The mantle is made of green silk, with floral patterns embroidered in gilt silver and copper thread. The fabric had apparently already been reused when pieces of purple velvet with embroidered patterns of cats, a crab, birds and a man on horseback were appliqued to it (fig. 13b). However, the maker of the mantle seems to have been dissatisfied with these patterns, and he reversed the material so that these representations would be upside-down, obscuring the original form. Whether this alteration was deliberate or not, it constituted a change of the kind dictated by R. Ya'ir Bacharach when preparing a ritual object from secular material, as mentioned above.

The group of mantles made of reused material accounts for the largest number of mantles in the sample, also originating in all parts of the Ottoman Empire. There are numerous examples from Greece,⁷⁹ Bulgaria and former Yugoslavia,⁸⁰ as well as Sephardi synagogues in Israel. It is clear from the latter category that such personal and domestic items used to be—and still are—kept for years, until a fitting opportunity arose, when they were donated to the synagogue and mantles prepared from them. An example is the mantle made from a *bohça* or a square tablecloth. In this case, the inscription was of paramount importance, and the designer found a way to organize all the necessary words around the central pattern and along the rear axis of the mantle. The two Hebrew words for “Eternal

⁷⁸ As is evident from the fact that pieces of embroidery were cut from the original velvet and sewn onto another expanse of similarly colored velvet.

⁷⁹ Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw, nos. C-83/14 (mantle made from a *bohça*); C-82/1 (mantle made from some large object).

⁸⁰ A mantle made of two pillowcases may be seen in the collection of the *Yagel Ya 'aqov* synagogue of immigrants from Monastir, Jerusalem: IJA [number not available].

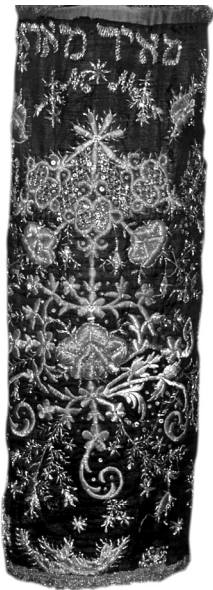


(a)



(b)

Fig. 12. Torah scroll mantle, Turkey, source unknown, length: 88 cm, upper width: 65 cm, lower width: 84 cm, diameter: 21 cm. Purple silk velvet. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, no. 151/136. (a) rear (b) top.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 13. Torah scroll mantle, Antalya, Turkey, length: 73 cm, upper width: 78 cm, lower width: 78 cm, diameter: 25 cm. Purple silk velvet. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, no. 151/148. (a) rear (b) detail, upside-down view.

memorial” are embroidered at the top; to the right and left of the central pattern are the words “Dedicated to exaltation of the soul of / the member of the *Haganah* / Nissim son of Joia Aziz, may the Lord avenge his blood, / who fell in defense of the homeland / 22 Kislev [5]708 [= December 5, 1947]”; the words “in the 19th year of his life” are added at the bottom. Given the circumstances of the dedication, the donors no doubt spared no expense in perpetuating the youth’s memory. The selection of this domestic item indicates its prestige and importance.

Another characteristic of the mantles in this group is the emphasis on the rear of the mantle, which was only natural, given the pre-existence of a basic pattern in the original embroidered object. Incorporation of the pattern was possible only on an uninterrupted area, which was clearly available in such mantles only from the rear (figs. 11, 12). The magnificent rear of the mantle is revealed only when the scroll is taken out of the Torah ark and brought to the reading desk.⁸¹ This emphasis on the rear was ultimately the cause of a structural change in the mantle toward the end of the twentieth century. Namely, once mantles began to be made from the start as such (rather than from reused material), that side became the main focus of the composition and the opening of the mantle shifted to the rear; this will be discussed further below.

3. The third group comprises mantles whose decoration and cut were designed expressly for their function as Torah mantles; this is apparently the most recent of the three groups. The material is cut in a trapezoid shape, with the upper hem sewn around the top of the mantle and a row of tassels sewn along the opening and the lower hem. The mantles of this group fall into two subgroups according to the characteristics of the material and the ornamentation. The first is the Turkish group, characterized by felted woolen fabric to which various pieces of hammered silver, with flat or raised patterns, are attached (fig. 14). This combination of felted woolen fabric and metal ornamentation originated in the material culture of the Ottoman army, particularly in the adornment of horses’ saddles and other military appurtenances.⁸² These elements present a rich variety of examples of the

⁸¹ See the following photographs of mantles from the rear: JUHASZ, *Sephardi Jews*, p. 75, figs. 12, 13; p. 81, fig. 21; p. 94, fig. 36—compare this illustration with the appearance of the mantles in the photograph of the open Torah ark on the same page.

⁸² Ottoman 17th century horse saddles: E. PETRASCH, R. SÄNGER, E. ZIMMERMANN & H. G. MAJER, *Die Karlsruher Türkenbeute* (München 1991), pp. 103-108; arrow quivers: Z.

silversmith's work. They include small domes of various sizes, crescents and stars, flowers, leaves, and so on. The many elements are organized within the area of the mantle in such a way as to create a recurrent, rhythmical and harmonious design. The usual compositions in these mantles are based on emphasizing the hems, though in some examples there is also a focus on the rear of the mantle. The design of the illustrated mantle is organized around a star-shaped element within a circle of stars and points. The mantles of this subgroup seem to have allowed the designers much creative freedom, and each example has its own unique character.⁸³

The second subgroup seems to have made its first appearance in the parts of the Balkans liberated from Ottoman rule—Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and former Yugoslavia. These mantles are generally made of velvet with gilt embroidery, as usual in Turkey, but their designs are based on a focus of Jewish significance, around which is a frame consisting of floral motifs, stars, small flowers, etc. The “Jewish content” is represented by such motifs as the “Crown of Torah” and the Tablets of the Law, with an inscription in Hebrew, Ladino or sometimes both. The “Crown of Torah” and the Tablets of the Law probably reached Balkan Sephardi synagogues in the wake of the liberation from the Ottoman yoke and the resultant exposure to European culture. This is clearly reflected in mantles of Torah scrolls from Greece.⁸⁴ Incidentally, the flow of influence was bidirectional: Ottoman motifs may be found embroidered on Ashkenazi Torah mantles from these areas.⁸⁵

Such receptiveness to innovation was typical of Turkish Jewry, and indeed, since the beginning of the twentieth century these new elements have

ŻYGULSKI, JR., *Ottoman Art in the Service of the Empire* (New York & London 1992), p. 146; H. TEZCAN & S. DELIBAŞ, *The Topkapi Saray Museum, Costumes, Embroideries and other Textiles* (London 1986), no. 92.

⁸³ Among mantles documented in Istanbul, some are decorated with the seven-branched *menorah* (Israel Museum, Ethnography Department Archives, no. 132.1515). The collection of the New York Jewish Museum contains a mantle in which some of the attached metal ornaments are Turkmenian women's jewelry (mantle no. F5132).

⁸⁴ Examples of mantles of this group from Greece: Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw, nos. C-82/11, C-83/2. Another prominent feature of the Greek mantles is the dedicatory inscription in Ladino.

⁸⁵ The collection of the Belgrade Jewish Museum includes some interesting examples, such as Ashkenazi Torah mantles with star patterns: V. NEDOMAČKI, *Vezene tkanine iz jevrejskih zbirki u Jugoslaviji* (Beograd 1978), figs. 26, 35.



Fig. 14. Torah scroll mantle (rear view), Edirne, Turkey, length: 92 cm, upper width: 94 cm, lower length: 143 cm, diameter: 27/31 cm, green felted wool and silver platelets, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, no. 151/122.



Fig. 15. Torah scroll mantle (rear view), 1962, Ankara, Turkey, length: 99 cm, upper width: 94 cm, lower width: 143 cm, diameter: 27/31 cm, green cotton velvet, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, no. 151/168.

transformed the structure and ornamentation of Turkish Torah mantles. An additional Ashkenazi motif, besides those mentioned in the previous paragraph, is the *Magen David*, the “Star of David,” with added emphasis on the inscription (see below). The combination of the motifs and the inscription created a prominent focus, which formed yet another cause for the most important modification of the Sephardi mantle in recent generations—the shift of the opening from the front to the rear. Most of the new mantles in Turkish synagogues are no different today from Ashkenazi mantles, only the names of the donors attesting to their Sephardi origin.⁸⁶

As noted, the dedicatory inscription has also received further emphasis in recent times. Such, for example, is a mantle dedicated to an Ankara synagogue in 1962 by one Mordekai Behar Abraham in memory of his wife Esther, daughter of Siniora (fig. 15). Here the designers dispensed

⁸⁶ For photographs of modern mantles from Turkey see MITRANI & ALOK, *Anatolian Synagogues*, p. 262.

with the usual motifs, featuring only a star and two Stars of David. The inscription, however, was much expanded, and it fills a large part of the front of the mantle, its importance further emphasized by the vocalization of the text—very unusual in such inscriptions. Interestingly, the inscription also includes the word *mappah*, attesting to the vitality of the ancient Hebrew term which has been used since antiquity to designate this important Torah scroll accessory.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the accessories used to protect and store the Sephardi Torah scroll in the Balkans, in particular in Turkey, were characteristically made of costly and beautiful materials. Presumably, Jewish involvement in the silk trade,⁸⁷ and in the manufacture of silk materials,⁸⁸ promoted the use of such fabrics for making ritual objects. The crowded patterns of these costly textiles did not permit the natural evolution of dedicatory inscriptions—a characteristic feature of Torah scroll accessories in the Balkans until recent times. One finds these communities adopting a similar conception in the design of Torah ark curtains, which were also made of costly (sometimes reused) materials. The use of the “Gate of Heaven” as a motif in Turkish Torah ark curtains was based on the standard design of Muslim prayer rugs; but the foreign element was “converted to Judaism” by the

⁸⁷ For Jewish involvement in the silk trade see: H. GERBER, “Jews in Edirne (Adrianopolis) in the 16th and 17th Centuries” (Hebrew), *Sefunot* [NS] 3 [18] (1985) pp. 41, 47; ID., “Jews in the Economic Life of the Anatolian City of Bursa in the 17th Century: Comments and Documents” (Hebrew), *Sefunot* [NS] 1 [16] (1980), pp. 240, 242, 244, 248, 249; ID., *Ottoman Empire*, pp. 67-69; D. GOFFMAN, “The Position of Jews in Commercial Life in the Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern Period” (Hebrew), in *Days of the Crescent: Chapters in the History of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (Hebrew), ed. M. Rosen (Tel Aviv 1996), pp. 52-53. For woolen materials (manufacture and trade) see GOFFMAN, *ibid.*, p. 52 (Salonika), 60-61 (Izmir); H. GERBER & Y. BARNAY, *The Jews of Izmir in the Nineteenth Century: Turkish Documents from the Sharia Court* (Jerusalem 1985), p. 4 (Izmir); GERBER, *Ottoman Empire*, p. 67 (internal commerce).

⁸⁸ On the supply of silver thread for the local manufacture of brocade, see: GERBER, “Bursa,” pp. 240, 246 and n. 41, 258-259, doc. 4; ID., *Ottoman Empire*, pp. 104-105, doc. 32. On the manufacture of silk velvet in a Jewish workshop see ID., “Bursa,” pp. 158-159, doc. 2, 249.

addition of the inscription "This is the gateway to the Lord, the righteous shall enter through it" (Psalms 118:20), either woven or embroidered into the fabric.⁸⁹ Clearly, the incorporation of an inscription was of secondary importance in these circumstances, and the standard of embroidery is generally evidence of a non-professional hand. Indeed, although Jews worked in embroidery workshops,⁹⁰ one does not find among them independent embroiderers doing specifically Jewish work. Who, then, were the makers of the Torah wrappers, binders and mantles in Turkey?

Unfortunately, contemporary documentation does not answer this question, and one can do no more than resort to a technical analysis of the items. The early linen wrappers from Dubrovnik were clearly the work of local Jewish women. The combination of linen material and bobbin lace is characteristic of women's work throughout Europe, and it probably reached this part of the Jewish world together with the refugees from the Spanish Expulsion.⁹¹ The running stitches in the various binders indicate that the design of wrappers and binders did not require a professional hand; these objects were readily prepared within the family.

That is not the case, however, with regard to Torah mantles, particularly velvet mantles with gold-thread embroidery. The manufacture of the wooden top with its two holes and cloth covering was presumably entrusted to an upholsterer, as is indicated by the finishing of the circumference of the holes in one of our examples (fig. 12b). The use of upholsterer's nails to attach the fabric covering to the wood and the robe to the top reinforce this assumption. Pieces of embroidered velvet were probably also attached to the mantle by a professional upholsterer, as were the lining and the rows of tassels, unless, of course, there was a family member who knew how to work with heavy velvet. The felted woolen mantles with small silver ornaments were also probably made by professionals, since the insertion or sewing of the pieces of silver into the material, to form a stable pattern, surely required expertise and experience. This technique was known

⁸⁹ For this phenomenon and examples of such curtains see JUHASZ, *Sephardi Jews*, pls. 17-20. For the prayer rugs see M. H. BEATTIE, "Coupled-Column Prayer Rugs," *Oriental Art* 14 (1968), p. 243; A. FELTON, *Jewish Carpets: A History and Guide* (Woodbridge, Suffolk 1997), pp. 160-162, 166-167.

⁹⁰ For Jewish women employed in embroidery workshops with Greek and Armenian embroiderers in the mid nineteenth century see JOHNSTONE, *Turkish Embroidery*, p. 9.

⁹¹ Most of the linen wrappers in the collection in Rome specify the embroiderers' names.

throughout Turkey, as witness the many woolen Torah ark curtains with patterns made in this way.⁹² It presumably required the involvement of a Jewish silversmith, a common Jewish occupation in Turkey, to make the small silver ornaments. The mantles prepared from the start as such (i.e., the group of new mantles) were undoubtedly made by professionals. Apart from gold embroidery, we also find other techniques in this group, such as chain stitching by machine, or the use of velvet in a metal structure;⁹³ however, these mantles are exceptions to the common tradition, and are therefore not of interest in the present context.

In conclusion, we might mention the receptiveness of Sephardi rabbis, who lent an ear to public sentiment and permitted the reuse of materials for ritual objects. Were it not for this attitude, Torah scroll accessories in the Sephardi communities of the Balkans would have been quite different.

RESUMEN

Estudio del desarrollo de tres ornamentos del *séfer Torá* o rollo de la Ley de tradición sefardí: la faja, banda estrecha y alargada que sujeta el rollo de la Ley dispuesto en torno a sus *'amudim*; el cendal, lienzo protector que cubre la cara posterior del pergamino; y la capa, manto exterior del *séfer Torá*. Estos accesorios textiles tienen su origen en la *mappá/mitpáhat* talmúdica, una pieza cuadrada de paño usada en la antigüedad para envolver el *séfer Torá*, complemento que dio origen a los accesorios europeos para la protección y adorno de aquél. Mientras que en las comunidades de tradición asquenásí sólo se utilizaba la faja y la capa, la originalidad de la tradición sefardí se muestra en el cendal que cubre el rollo, de igual anchura a la del pergamino con el que se enrolla, siendo usual su presencia en la tradición sefardí hasta la actualidad. Aunque faja y capa son comunes a las tradiciones europea y sefardí, es en esta última donde adquieren rasgos visuales únicos. Uno de ellos es el uso de paños preciosos, principalmente brocados o bordados con hilo de oro. Tales antecedentes espléndidos no sirvieron de acicate para el desarrollo de inscripciones dedicatorias, pero sí animaron la reutilización de valiosas piezas textiles que habían servido previamente para otros usos de la vida cotidiana. Este estudio está basado en la documentación de objetos ceremoniales de diversas colecciones, en textos rabínicos y en investigaciones de campo en sinagogas de tradición sefardí.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Mitpáhat*, *mappá*, *hekal*/arca santa, *séfer Torá*, faja, cendal y capa de la Torá, tejido.

⁹² For woolen Torah ark curtains and silver ornaments see JUHASZ, *Sephardi Jews*, pp. 91-93, 95.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pl. 21b.

SUMMARY

The article deals with the development of three accessories of the Sephardic Torah scroll: the Torah binder—a narrow and long strip which fastened both parts of the scroll; the Torah wrapper—which protects the parchment; and the Torah mantle—the exterior covering of the Torah scroll. These textile accessories originate in the Talmudic *mappah/mitpaḥat*, a square piece of fabric which, in the ancient period, was used to wrap the Torah scroll. This object turned out to be the origin of the European means of protecting and adorning the Torah scroll.

While in Ashkenazi communities only the Binder and the Mantle are customary, the uniqueness of the Sephardi tradition is an additional accessory—the Wrapper. The Wrapper, a fabric equal in height to that of the parchment, is wound around the staves, and is customary to this very day in the Sephardic Diaspora.

Although the Binder and the Mantle are common to all European and Sephardi communities, in the latter these ceremonial objects have unique visual features. One of them is the use of precious fabrics, mainly brocades and gold embroidered fabrics. Such a magnificent background did not encourage the development of dedicatory inscriptions, on the one hand, but on the other it did encourage the recycling of precious textiles that had previously served in other capacities in daily life. The article is based on the documentation of ceremonial objects from various collections as well as on Rabbinic literature and field research in Sephardi synagogues in Israel and abroad.

KEYWORDS: *Mitpaḥat*, *Mappah*, *Hekal*, Holy Ark, Torah Scroll, Torah Wrapper, Torah Binder, Torah Mantle, Textile Fabric.