

A Unique Passover Plate

And a further eleven of great interest

By Tsadik Kaplan of the USA

Material: Pewter - Origin: Germany, 1775 - Artist: Schulberr (unknown)

Dimensions: 14" in diameter

This plate was professionally engraved by an artist employed in a workshop. Pewter Passover plates decorated in Jewish workshops can vary in terms of quality; some plates might be simple, having the word "Passover" in the center of the plate, and the order of the Seder on the rim.

Finer still are plates with these elements along with a pictorial scene copied from a Haggadah. Then the quality of these plates can reach even higher, having elaborate decoration, until the entire plate is filled with Hebrew verses and scenes relating to Passover; the best of these plates combine an excellent balance between calligraphic and pictorial decoration.

Between approximately 1750 and 1800 is when these "high end" types of Passover plates were engraved in workshops.

The plate featured is a "high end" piece. The outer rim has the verse "You must not eat anything leavened. In all the areas where you live, eat matzahs" (Exodus 12:20). A deer and bird flank two sets of initials, which represent that of a husband and wife, the owners of this plate. The inner rim has the Passover rhyme *Chad Gadya* ("One Little Goat") depicted, with the goat, cat, dog, stick, fire, water, ox, butcher, Angel of Death and G-d himself, represented by the word *Shechinah* ("Divine Spirit") inside a circle with rays emanating from it. Under each illustration is the beginning of that particular verse.

Then, these two verses; “The entire community of Israel shall then slaughter (their sacrifices) in the afternoon”, “Eat the [sacrificial] meat during the night, roasted over fire. Eat it with matzah and bitter herbs.” (Exodus 12: 6-8). In the center it shows two men; the one on the right is in the traditional Synagogue dress of eighteenth century German Jews, which was a flat round hat, sleeveless gown, and frilled collar. Next to him is written “Matzah, Bitter Herbs”, as that is what he is holding in each hand. The man on the left holds a lamb (representing the Paschal Lamb), by a leash in one hand, and a butchers knife in the other. Above both men it reads “The Passover service” (Exodus 12:27). The engraver of this piece, proud of his work, signs his name in cursive English script “Schulberr”, underneath the lamb.

This should be the conclusion of the engraving of this plate. Incredibly, the reverse is decorated as well. The rim has the verse “From the 14th day of the first month in the evening, until the night of the 21st day of the month, you must eat [only] matzahs.” (Exodus 12:18). In the center, it says in a mixture of Hebrew and German “This is a wedding gift from the cantor” (*Einwurf* is old German for “wedding gift”), and then “in order of the small counting”. This last statement is an indication to add up the numerical value of the Hebrew letters from “This is a wedding gift...”, to discover the date of the wedding, which when tallied, equals 1775.

There are perhaps a few hundred pewter Passover plates scattered across the globe in museums and private collections, maybe as many as a thousand or so. None have the reverse side of the plate engraved, which makes this example unique.





Here follows details of eleven other plates in the author's collection

Plate 1



Material: Pewter - Origin: Germany circa 1775 - Artist: Hebrew initials "YLH" on reverse (unknown) Dimensions: 9.25" in diameter

Unlike the pewter plates previously pictured and described, this plate has no references to the Sabbath, Passover, or other holidays. The purpose of this plate and the ten plates shown subsequent to this one are unclear. Perhaps their function was similar to that of a painting; to display on a wall, and enjoy it for arts sake. It's educational as well, as the viewer becomes familiar with episodes of the Torah.

This plate shows Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, along with the snake wrapped around the Tree of Knowledge. The depictions of Adam and Eve are extremely naïve, the figures themselves having no telltale signs of gender specificity. The figure on the left (holding the forbidden fruit), with longer hair is titled in Hebrew "Chava" (Eve), and the figure on the right "Odom" (Adam).

Although the engraver or workshop of this Adam & Eve plate is not known, for the ten plates and bowls on the following pages, it is apparent they were all engraved in the same workshop, possibly by the same engraver, in nineteenth century Germany. Other “Biblical dishes”, from this workshop are in the collection of the Judaica Museum of Koln, Germany and in the collection of Mishkan Le’Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein-Harod, Israel.

Plate 2:



In the center, Sarah stands in the doorway of her house (with tiled roof and chimney!), while Abraham runs to greet three angels. In the background is a table under a tree.

On the rim in Hebrew; “[Abraham] lifted his eyes and he saw three strangers standing a short distance from him. When he saw [them] from the entrance of his tent, he ran to greet them” (Genesis 18:2)

Plate 3 (really a bowl, as are a few others) :



There are two Midianite Arabs with hats, one leads Joseph away, another pays. In the background is a pit with ladder and snake, beneath the tree on the right, three of Josephs brothers slaughter a goat to stain the coat of many colors.

On rim in Hebrew: “They sold Joseph to the Arabs for twenty pieces of silver” (Genesis 37:28)

Plate 4:



Jacob is seated, one of his sons is showing him the bloodied coat of many colors that belonged to Joseph. There is a background landscape with an animal, tree and sun.

On rim in Hebrew: "It was brought to their father. 'We found this coat.'" (Genesis 37:32)

Plate 6:



Joseph's brothers are stunned, as Egyptians (with mustaches), discover the goblet in Benjamin's pack.

On rim in Hebrew: "[The overseer] inspected each one, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. The chalice was found in Benjamin's pack." (Genesis 44:12)

Plate 7:



King Solomon on his throne commands a soldier to split a baby in two, as the false mother holds a dead child and the real mother waves her arms about hysterically.

On rim in Hebrew: “The song that excels all songs dedicated to G-d, the King to Whom peace belongs. Communicate Your innermost wisdom to me again in loving closeness, for Your friendship is dearer than all earthly delights.” (Song of Songs 1:1-2, indirect reference to works of Solomon)

Plate 8:



The glorious hair of Avshalom is caught in a tree; he is on his horse with a frightened soldier in the background.

On rim in German: "Avshalom is hanged in an oak." (Samuel II 18:10)

Plate 9:



Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons Machlon and Kilion are walking.

On rim in German: "And a man went from Bethlehem in Judah to sojourn in the fields of Moab, he, his wife, and his two sons." (Ruth 1:1)

Plate 10:



Naomi, Orpah and Ruth are shown with sad expressions above three corpses lying on a bed, i.e., their deceased husbands.

On rim in German: "Naomi lost her children and husband" (paraphrase of Ruth 1:5)

Plate 11:



Rabbi at table oversees the *halitzah* ceremony as a woman removes her brother-in-law's shoe. On rim in German: paraphrase of Ruth 1:5

This plate is very interesting, as this scene, while alluded to in the text, did not actually occur, since Ruth was redeemed by her husband's relative Boaz and did not require the *halitzah* ceremony