

IT'S PURIM!



The Sages taught that our joy increases as the Hebrew month of Adar begins:
mi-sheh'nikhnas Adar, mar'bim 'bsimhah, a difficult instruction to fulfill easily in the
current dire situation. Specific instructions for increasing joy appear in *Megillat Es'teyr* –the

Scroll of Esther – in Ketuvim, the third section of our Bible, where we are instructed to observe the 14th day of the month of Adar as a day of feasting and merrymaking, an occasion for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor. Even in difficult times, and perhaps especially now, we should celebrate Purim, with its story of Jewish survival.

Indeed, the joyous celebration of the festival of Purim is coming soon – including the congregational sending of *shalakh manot* “baskets” to one another (an excellent fundraiser), the reading of the megillah, the carnival – and this year, our TSWE youth and adult players will present a musical Purim spiel called “ESTHER AND THE BEAST”!

And so, the TSWE museum features a number of *megillot*: in wooden cases and cardboard cylinders, bound in fabric, written in micrography in the shape of a crown, and more.





The small Book of Esther (above, center), illustrated by the Israeli artist Nahum Gutman, was published by Omanut Tel Aviv in 1932. Gutman's whimsical style enlivens the already action-packed text. The color drawing on the cover shows what is supposed to be a furious and embittered Haman leading Mordecai on the king's horse through the streets of Shushan, compelled to shout out, "Thus shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor," exactly what he had hoped that Ahasuerus was going to have Mordecai do for him. The pink silk cover of the book is now much-faded.

Jewish tradition forbade any extraneous decoration in Torah scrolls. But that prohibition did not pertain to scrolls of Esther such as this one, from 18th century Italy.



ויהי כי אחשורוש הוא אחשורוש המלך מהרו וינך טיש
שכין וינשרים ומאה מרינה בימים ההם כשכרת המלך
אחשורוש ינל כסא מלכותו אשר כשושן הבירה בשנת
שלוש לכלו ינשה משהה לכל ישריו וינבריו חיל פרס וכדי
הפרהבים ושרי המדינות לפעו בהראתו את ינשר כבוד
מלכותו ואת יקר תפארת גדולתו ימים רבים שכונס ופאת
יום ובכלואת הימים האלה ינשה המלך לכל היונע הנמצאים
כשושן הבירה לבגדול וינך קטן משהה שכנינך ימים
בהצר גנת בית המלך וזוור כרפס והבלת ארוז בדברי
בוין וארנכן ינל גלילי ככף וינכודי שיש בטות זרב וככף ינל
רצפת בהט ושיש ודר וסחרת והשקות בכרי זרב וככריים
מכלים שונם ויין מלכות רב ביד המלך והשתיה נרת אין
אנס כי כן יסד המלך ינל כל רב ביתו לינישות כרצון איש
גם וישתי המלכה ינשרה משהה
ואיש
נשים בית המלכות אשר למלך אחשורוש ביום השביין
כטוב לב המלך ביין אכר למהוכן כותא הרבונא כנחא
ואכנתא זתר וכרכס שבנות הסריסים הכשרתים את
פע המלך אחשורוש להביא את וישתי המלכה לפע
המלך ככתר מלכות להראות הינקים והישרים את יפה
כי טובת מראה היא ותבאן המלכה וישתי לבוא בדבר
המלך אשר ביד הסריסים ויקצף המלך כאר ורחבתו
בינרה בו
ויאמר המלך להככים ידיו
הינתלם כי כן דבר המלך לפע כל ידיו דת ודין והקרב
אליו כרישנא שתר אדכרנא תרשיש כרס מרסנא כמוכן





Micrography is a Jewish form of calligraphy developed in the 9th century. It uses minute Hebrew letters to create religious texts comprised of words in geometric or representational designs. This is the entire 10 chapters of Megillat Esther written in micrographic form in the shape of a crown. The first and last lines are written larger than the body of the “book.” The opening line reads *Va-y’hee b’yimei Ahasaurosh* – “And it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus...” The last seven Hebrew words – *doresh tov l’amo, shalom l’hol zaro* – “He sought the good of his people and

interceded for the welfare of all his kindred,” are a description of Mordecai. The calligrapher signs her name Nechama. This is number 221 of 270 prints of this work.

The text below is an enlargement of the upper portion of the micrographed text.



Also on display here is a variety of noisemakers – graggers, which is what they are called in Yiddish; the Hebrew word for gragger is *ra-a-shan* (pl. *ra-a-shanim*, a word that appears in many Purim songs). We use noisemakers to muffle the name of Haman (boo!) to blot out Haman's name whenever it is pronounced during the reading of the megillah. Some people bang spoons against pot to drown out Haman's name. Others stamp their feet on the floor – sometimes after writing Haman's name in chalk on the bottom of their shoes. We are told that it is, or was, a tradition in top hat-wearing, restrained British congregations for worshipers to prepare a page with Haman's name written in pencil the exact number of times it appears in the megillah and then carefully erase it each time the hated name is read. The custom originated from the biblical command to “blot out the name of Amalek.” Haman is considered by our tradition to be a descendent of the treacherous Amalekites.



See above some of the varieties of *ra'a'shanim*, among the many ways to blot out Haman's name!



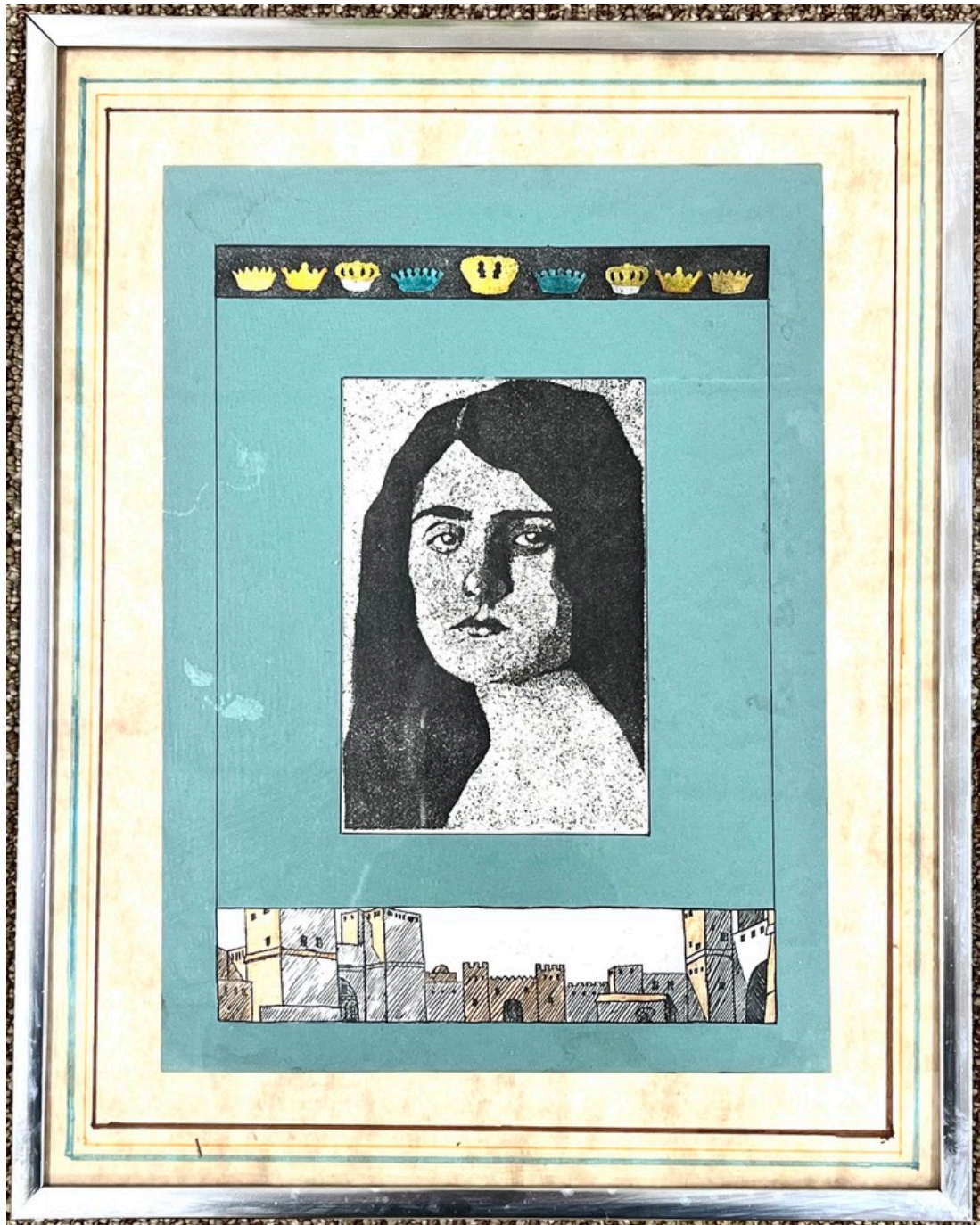
Along the top shelf, (next to a doll that probably represents either King Ahasaurus or Esther's uncle, Mordecai, after he has been elevated to high position by the king), are from left to right Achashverosh [sic], Esther, Mordecai, and a jester on plates just the right size for large hamantaschen (the three-cornered pastries that are a feature of this festival). Their names are in script under their pictures (see the photos below).

The cover of the box on the far right of the bottom shelf in the case (see the large photo above – or come and check it out at temple) is decorated with a picture of hamantaschen. According to tradition (a phrase which means that no one knows for certain) that the tri-corner shape represents Haman's hat (boo!) or Haman's pockets, with no rational reason given for either. In the "old" days, meaning the middle of the last century, hamantaschen were all filled with poppy seeds or prunes. In more recent years, their fillings tend to be more eclectic and feature ingredients like peanut butter and apricot preserves, or chocolate and marshmallow fluff (etc.).

The man in this sculpture by Frank Meisler is poised, ready to blow the trumpet he is holding in his right hand. Is he waiting for the person chanting the megillah to mention the name of that man whose name ought not be mentioned?



The woodblock below is the artist's depiction of Queen Esther, who looks very serious and determined – perhaps reflecting the situation of the Jews of Europe in 1939, the year the book was printed. It is the cover of a megillah published by the Bar Kochba Association, a Zionist organization of Jewish university students in Prague in the first part of the 20th century. The unsigned work is in a style known as Pathetiker, German Expressionism. The buildings below the portrait are of a walled city, the artist's vision of Shushan.





The large Hebrew text on this Purim plate reads: *Shalah manot ish l'rey-eyh-hu u-matanot la-ev'yo'nim* – Purim “portions” to send to family, friends and to the poor. It is an Israel Museum reproduction of a faience plate from 18th century Alsace, France. The English translation of the smaller Hebrew lettering above the central illustration is, “Thus shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.” Both are quotes from the Book of Esther. The illustration itself shows Haman compelled to lead Mordecai through the streets of Shushan (as on the cover of the small pink megillah illustrated by Nahum Gutman, above. He looks far more unhappy here.)

This particular plate was severely damaged in the line of duty and lovingly, if imperfectly, restored. We are sorry to report that no hamantaschen survived.

On their first trip to Turkey, Rabbi Patz and Naomi were intrigued by the wonderful Karagöz puppets they saw in the city of Bursa. They particularly loved the two figures they were told represent figures in the Purim story wearing 18th century Ottoman clothing. Karagöz puppets interact in a “Punch and Judy” type shadow theater, which takes its name from its primary hero, whose name is Karagöz (“Black Eye” in Turkish). The flat figures traditionally are made from camel, water buffalo, cow or calf hide, which is rendered translucent by washing, scraping, and polishing. Using vegetable dyes, the lines and details of the costume are traced and painted in lively, translucent colors (which each maker apparently keeps secret). The figures are attached to each other by a string of gut. For a performance on stage, they are articulated at the neck, the waist or legs, and manipulated by narrow sticks affixed perpendicularly to the back of each figure. You can see from the squarish holes on the right arm and shoulder of each figure below where their sticks were inserted.





Queen Esther



Her cousin – or uncle – Mordecai



King Achashverosh (sic.)



A jester in the royal court



Would that it were this easy to save our people from our foes.
Ahm Yisrael hai!