

Yerachmiel (Richard) Cohen

Torah Breastplates from Augsburg in the Israel Museum*

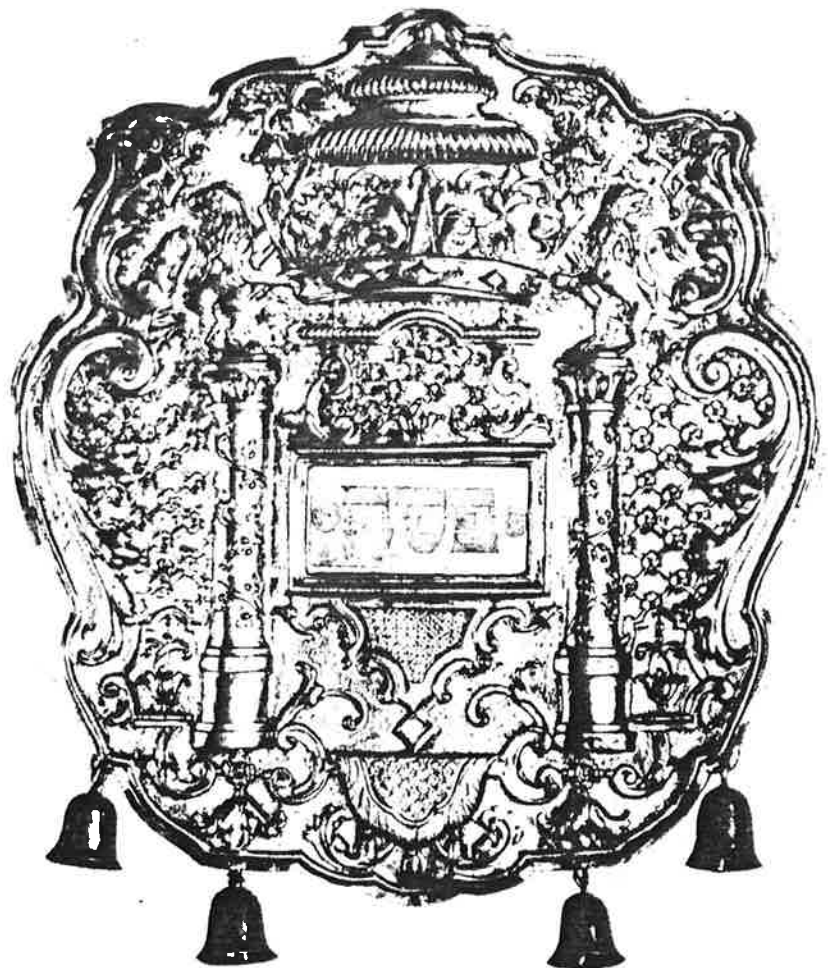


1
Breastplate, Augsburg, 1751-53. Silver,
repoussé and engraved. Marks R 907
908(?), 254. 16 x 14 cm. Lent by Yad
Vashem, Jerusalem, 1950. No. 148/111,
inv. no. 2657-4-50

The custom of hanging a breastplate with special memory upon the mantle originated in the fifteenth century and became common in Central Europe in the seventeenth century. The breastplate was intended to designate which Scroll of the Law was to be read in the synagogue on any specific occasion. Over the years the function of the breastplate became more purely decorative, and it developed iconographic and ornamental motifs specific to different areas. This article will trace the development of Torah breastplates in a major centre of European silver, Augsburg, and illustrate their unique features.

From the late sixteenth century Augsburg began to replace Nuremberg as the centre of silver in Germany. By the middle of the seventeenth century Augsburg had become the main German centre, whose style had an influence reaching far beyond southern Germany. Augsburg goldsmiths absorbed the new forms of the Renaissance while Nuremberg goldsmiths tended to conservatism and preserved a more medieval tradition. Thus in silver, as in other crafts, there was a basic difference between the two cities, despite their physical proximity, and this is seen also in Torah breastplates. Most of the thirteen breastplates from Augsburg in the collection of the Israel Museum differ from Nuremberg examples in structure, ornamentation and iconography.

The Israel Museum's breastplates from Augsburg date from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries, the period from which Augsburg breastplates in other collections are also known. The makers of the breastplates belong to well-known families of goldsmiths such as the Stenglin and Drentwett families. Other makers, such as Mattheus (or Markus) Wolff and Cornelius Poppe, are known as the makers



Breastplate, Augsburg, 1736-37. Silver-
en repoussé and engraved. Mark R¹239.
29.4 x 26.5 cm. Gift of the Jewish
Community of Berlin, 1950. No. 148/117,
inv. no. 2656-6-50

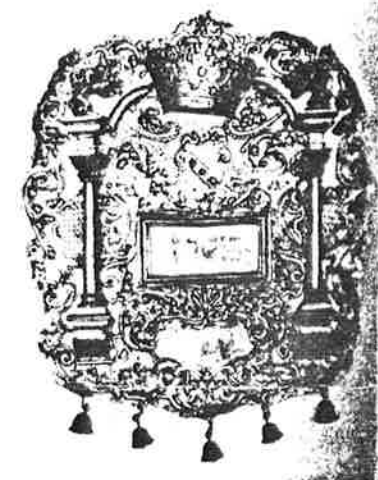
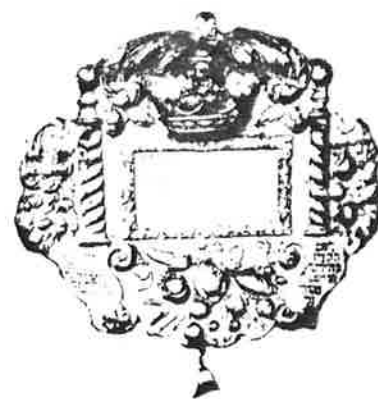
of various Jewish ceremonial objects.¹ The works were purchased by Jews either at the fairs of Leipzig and Frankfurt, where Augsburg goldsmiths displayed their wares, or by commission, directly from the goldsmiths. Though Jews were officially forbidden to live in Augsburg, they were permitted from the sixteenth century to enter the city and trade in it, and a wealthy few even succeeded in settling there. In 1719 the gentile goldsmiths refrained from signing a petition aimed at limiting Jewish activities in the city, fearing that such steps would adversely affect their lively trade with Jews.²

Augsburg breastplates can be divided into two groups dating from the late seventeenth century to the 1760s and from the 1760s to the 1820s. The Israel Museum's collection includes examples of the first period and of the later part of the second period. Characteristic of the first group is the cartouche shape; the tendency is to curved outlines, even in cases where the outline of the breastplate is based on a rectangle. In this way Augsburg goldsmiths rejected the form typical of early seventeenth-century German breastplates, including Nuremberg, the rectangle with a dome. In the 1760s a radical change to an architectonic, Neo-Classical structure took place. Outside Augsburg this second type is known in Munich alone.³

The first group includes ten breastplates (figs. 1-5, 7, 9, 11).⁴ They are unusually ornate and varied in composition. In the spirit of the flamboyant Baroque they are distinguished by a wealth of ornamentation which, not surprisingly, results in the subordination of iconographic motifs. The more common elements of breastplates — columns surmounted by rampant lions supporting a crown — do not dominate and determine the design. Common to all is the rectangular frame for holiday plaques, centrally placed and generally flanked by columns. These last do not invariably support lions, though in certain cases lions appear in a pose peculiar to Augsburg, with their bodies somewhat curved and their heads touching the crown;⁵ on the columns are balls, Corinthian capitals, or an arch. The crown is applied and is placed either between the columns or just over the rectangular frame.⁶ These breastplates reflect the pre-eminence of Augsburg silver in the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth century which in large part was due to its rich ornament.⁷ It would seem clear that this first group of breastplates from Augsburg — with their acanthus leaves, vines, latticed panels, flowers and vegetal motifs — should be viewed within the context of the local silver which affected their design. To illustrate this, we shall discuss several breastplates of this group.

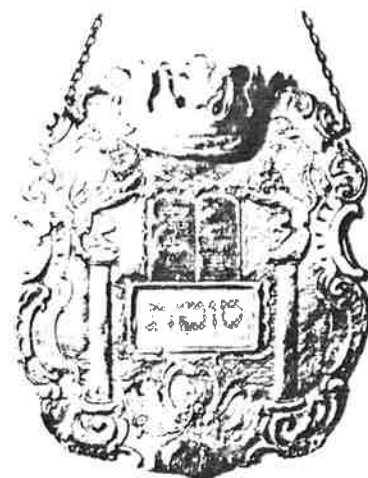
Mattheus (Markus?) Wolff was a well-known maker of Jewish ceremonial objects. Three breastplates made by him (no. 148/119 — fig. 4 — and Jewish Museum, New York, nos. JM 30-52 — fig. 5 — and S 34)⁸ are very similar to one another and demonstrate the difficulty in dating breastplates from Augsburg on the basis of the style of the columns. The Israel Museum's example, of the early eighteenth century, has plain columns with Corinthian capitals usually found in breastplates late in the century, while the two Jewish Museum breastplates of about the same time have spiral columns more typical of their period; this may be an example of a known occurrence, in which the same goldsmiths produce works in a late Baroque style virtually contemporary with others made in a style in advance of its time.⁹ But Wolff's works are more interesting from the point of view of their formal ornament, a feature which was widespread in silver early in the century and gained popularity due to printed designs used by goldsmiths. The rich ornament on Wolff's works seems to be taken from designs such as those of Johann Jakob Baumgartner (fig. 6a, b).¹⁰ In the three breastplates by Wolff the stylized ornament — the latticed panel, scrolls and vine — is dominant, with the more common elements being overshadowed.

The same was true in other cases. A breastplate by Hans Philipp Stenglin I (no. 148/10; fig. 7) lacks any Jewish features apart from the central rectangular frame; it is in repoussé, adorned with acanthus leaves, vines, clusters of grapes and cherries, and various fruits. In our opinion this breastplate was originally intended to be a wall calendar (*Wand-Kalendar*), a familiar object in private houses in Germany early in the eighteenth century. In the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg



3
Breastplate, Augsburg, c. 1700. Silver, repoussé and engraved, parcel gilt. Mark R¹675, 194A(?). 22.9 x 26 cm. Wiesbaden Collection, received 1950. No. 148/31, inv. no. 22-2-50

4
Breastplate, Augsburg, early 18th century. Silver, repoussé, engraved and cast, parcel gilt. Mark of Mattheus (Markus?) Wolff, R¹726; R¹218(?). 31.5 x 28.8 cm. Lent by Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1950. No. 148/119, inv. no. 2561-4-50



is a calendar of the period from Augsburg (inv. no. 1900.93; fig. 8) in the form of a cartouche and ornamented in a manner similar to our breastplate, with the exception of the female figures flanking the central frame.¹¹ This calendar has three rectangular frames intended for plaques denoting the day, month and year, the central one being the largest. At the request of a Jew, a goldsmith made the necessary change: as there is no use for more than one frame in a breastplate, he soldered the additional two at the back and left them plain, while the central one retained its function of containing plaques. The rich ornamentation was accepted, and the lack of any other Jewish features did not prevent the Jewish client from using the product as a breastplate.

Other Augsburg goldsmiths of the beginning of the eighteenth century combined the local formal ornament with motifs generally characteristic of breastplates. An example is one by Cornelius Poppe (no. 148/47; fig. 9), in which the central frame is flanked by spiral columns decorated with leaves and supporting an arch. Acanthus leaves, laurel and vines richly adorn the breastplate. It has the same decorative motifs as a tankard by the same maker in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (no. M.306-1923; fig. 10).¹² A comparison of breastplate no. 148/2 by maker F, of the early eighteenth century (fig. 11) with another tankard probably made by him and also in the Victoria and Albert Museum (no. 397-1864; fig. 12) shows that — with the exception of the columns, lions, crown and rectangular frame — the master used the same formal ornament in both cases.¹³ It is also evident that breastplates no. 148/31 of about 1700 (fig. 1) and no. 148/117 of 1736-37 (fig. 2) have types of ornament — such as the latticed panel, fruit and vegetables — which is found on both secular and religious Augsburg silver. These, too, can be traced to printed designs and are entirely the product of the local tradition in silver. It would appear that in this group of breastplates only the broadest lines of the object were set by the Jewish client, and the master made the object in his own style.¹⁴ Due to adherence to formal ornament, specifically Jewish motifs were omitted.

It is only in the 1760s that formal ornament becomes less dominant, as is seen in breastplate no. 148/78 (fig. 13), which dates from 1765-67 and is probably by Jakob Drentwett. It is still in cartouche form and its edges are adorned with shell forms and leaves, and the background with scales — a motif which is not usually found in early-eighteenth-century breastplates and is henceforth to figure in a number of breastplates. The iconography of this one also differs from that of earlier examples; the columns are plain, surmounted by lions holding the Tables of the Law and supporting a crown at the top of the breastplate. The Tables of the Law appear here at the centre, just over the holiday plaque, and this juxtaposition is to become consistent in architectonic breastplates of the second half of the century. The first known appearance of the Tables of the Law on an Augsburg breastplate is on an example of 1761-63 in the Jewish Museum, London,¹⁵ which is similar in shape to

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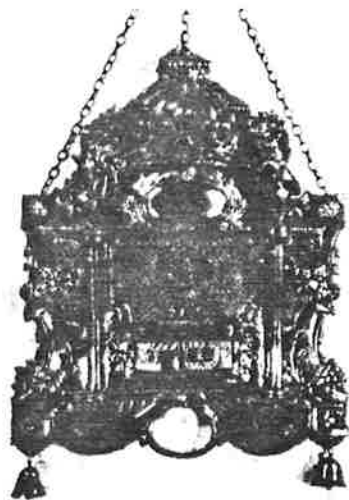
Breastplate, Augsburg, early 18th century. Silver, repoussé and engraved, parcel gilt. Marks R³777, 213. 33 x 29.7 cm. Wiesbaden Collection, received 1950. No. 148/2, inv. no. 226-2-50

12

Tankard, Augsburg, c. 1714. Silver-gilt. Mark F. Height 15.5 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, no. 397-1864

13

Breastplate, Augsburg, 1765-67. Silver, repoussé and engraved, parcel gilt. Mark of Johann Jakob Drentwett(?), R³267. 30.5 x 26.5 cm. Wiesbaden Collection, received 1950. No. 148/78, inv. no. 232-2-50



no. 148/78 (fig. 13), with a shell-shaped border and the same recurrent elements. On both breastplates, and especially in no. 148/78, formal ornament is less in evidence than previously, and there is a transition to certain features of the architectonic group.

Three breastplates belonging to this second group are in the Israel Museum's collection, and they all date from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century (figs. 17–19). However, the architectonic form and special features had appeared already thirty years earlier on a breastplate from Munich of 1764, no. 148/12 (fig. 14), and on an Augsburg breastplate in the Jewish Museum, New York (no. JM 50–61, fig. 15),¹⁶ and twenty years earlier on an Augsburg breastplate in the Sestieri Collection, Rome, of 1771–73 (fig. 16).¹⁷ Although the Munich example is the first known breastplate in this style, it is difficult to say whether the style originated in Munich, but certain of its elements point to its being a prototype of the architectonic style in Augsburg. We shall mention the most prominent of these. The Munich breastplate's structure is first found in Augsburg in the Sestieri Collection example of 1771–73 (fig. 16), where there is the scaled background and a seven- rather than nine-branched candelabrum.¹⁸ Breastplate no. 148/71 (fig. 17) is twenty years later than the Sestieri breastplate, but the elements of the centre of the breastplate are strictly adhered to.¹⁹ The leaves at the sides of this breastplate may be seen as a vestige of the candlesticks in the one from Munich. The two remaining breastplates from Augsburg in the Israel Museum display only slight changes: no. 148/42 of 1797–99 (fig. 19) by Franz Anton Gutwein has a centre shaped like a domed building and scale-decorated background. In breastplate no. 148/198 of 1803 by Bizer (fig. 18)²⁰ the centre is not shaped like a building and the background is plain, but there is a stylized seven-branched candelabrum on a frame reminiscent of the outline of the Sestieri breastplate and of no. 148/71 (fig. 17). In the centre are the Tables of the Law and below an ornamented frame for the plaques.

All Augsburg architectonic breastplates made after the one from Munich have long columns, some of them plain and others fluted. Above them are usually lions supporting an applied crown (the exception in the Israel Museum's collection being the one by Franz Gutwein). The return of this as a consistent motif forms another example of a return to the traditional breastplate form. Another feature of the breastplate from Munich which persisted — though not as consistently as others — over many years is the reversed gable-shaped base. The base features flower motifs in the corners and in the centre a medallion, usually with an inscription surrounded by a wreath. This type of medallion, generally surmounted by a bow, is a consistent motif at the centre of the base in contrast to the changing motifs around it. Three bells hang from rings at the base of the breastplate. Thus it emerges that Augsburg breastplates made a return — in the central structure and in motifs — to more common types. The formal ornament of the first half of the eighteenth century

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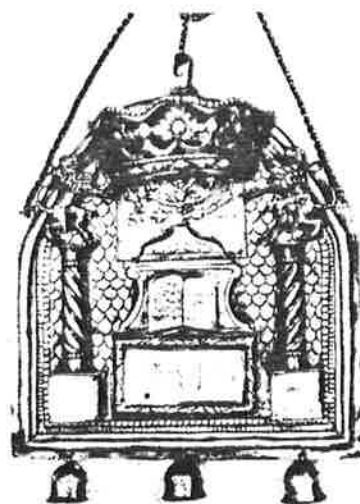
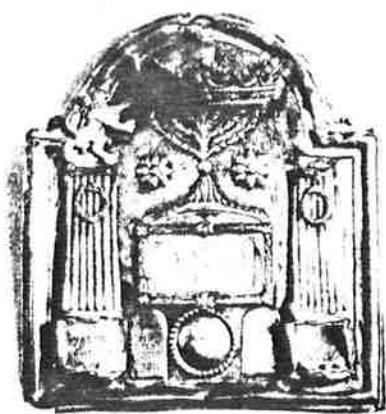
Breastplate, Augsburg, 1763–65. Silver, repoussé, engraved and cast. Jewish Museum, New York, gift of Samuel and Lucille Lemberg, 1961, no. JM 50–61

16

Breastplate, Augsburg, 1771–73. Silver. Sestieri Collection, Rome

17

Breastplate, Augsburg, 1791–93. Silver, repoussé, engraved and cast, parcel gilt. Mark of Johann Alois Süßer, R³1031 on crown and lions; R³284, B.S. 38.3 x 27.5 cm. Loan from Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1950. No. 148/71, inv. no. 2590–4:50



has been replaced. The gap apparent at the beginning of the century between Nuremberg and Augsburg in breastplates narrows, and the centres of the Augsburg breastplates come to resemble the entire breastplates of late-eighteenth-century Nuremberg masters such as Wolfgang Schubert (no. 148/153; fig. 20).²¹ It should also be noted that in one of the works by the very productive master IR from Fürth (no. 148/3; fig. 21) who was much influenced by Nuremberg, the structure and details resemble those of Augsburg.²²

This Neo-Classical style continued for at least two decades after the above mentioned breastplates.²³ The latest known breastplate of this type (no. 148/63; fig. 22) is from Munich, dates from 1825 and is by Louis Wollenweber.²⁴ The architectonic structure is formed by the motif of a Torah ark curtain whose edges are pulled to the sides, and at the sides are plain columns with foliated capitals on which are rampant lions. The background, central motifs and base are very similar to those on the breastplate of 1764 from Munich (fig. 14).

This was the end of the development of a type peculiar to Augsburg and Munich which brought back the iconographic motifs typical of breastplates and incorporated Jewish motifs; the architectonic style was long-lasting and, in contrast to that of early-eighteenth-century Augsburg breastplates, was very stereotyped – possibly due to the general decline of Augsburg silver in this period – as opposed to the variety of the earlier style which corresponded to the high point in Augsburg silver.

Translated by Yonna Yapou

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and the Hebrew Union College Skirball Museum, Los Angeles, for forwarding photographs and information on their collection.

The departmental numbers cited in the text (e.g. 148/52) denote breastplates in the collection of the Israel Museum.

- 1 Sylvia Rathke-Köhl, *Geschichte des Augsburger Goldschmiedegewerbes vom Ende des 17. Bis zum Ende der 18. Jahrhunderts*, Augsburg, n.d. (1964). For the works of Wolff and Poppe, see below, nn. 10 and 12.
- 2 See Raphael Strauss, *Regensburg and Augsburg*, Philadelphia, 1939, p. 206.

20

Breastplate, Nuremberg, 1794–97. Silver, repoussé, engraved and cast, parcel gilt. Mark of Wolfgang Schubert, R¹4305; R¹3768(?), 3780, 28.6 × 25.5 cm. Wiesbaden Collection, received 1950. No. 148/153, inv. no. 241–2–50

21

Breastplate, Fürth, 18th century. Silver, repoussé, engraved and pierced and cast. Mark of IR, R¹2157; R¹2152, 2154, Z. 25.4 × 22.2 cm. Wiesbaden Collection, received 1950. No. 148/3, inv. no. 235–2–50

22

Breastplate, Munich, 1825. Silver-gilt, cast, repoussé and engraved, precious and semi-precious stones. Mark of Louis Wollenweber, R¹3588; R¹3465, 41 × 26.2 cm. Lent by Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1950. No. 148/63, inv. no. 2584–4–50

3 With the exception of two breastplates from Munich, nos. 148/12 and 148/63, and one whose provenance is unknown, no. 148/157, probably of the beginning of the nineteenth century, from Germany. As this breastplate has no marks we have not listed it with the Augsburg breastplates, but it has all the components of this group. The spiral columns with bases in the form of a lion's head may not have formed part of the object originally.

4 Exceptions are nos. 148/208, which is in the form of a Torah ark curtain, and 148/52, which resembles a building with arches.

5 See nos. 148/2 (fig. 11), 148/78 (fig. 13), 149/20. Cf. S.S. Kayser and G. Seidenberger, *Jewish Ceremonial Art*, Philadelphia, 1959 (henceforth Kayser), no. 47.

6 For other examples see R.D. Barnett, ed., *Catalogue of the Permanent and Loan Collections of the Jewish Museum*, London, 1974, no. 139, and Kayser, op. cit., no. 47, and a breastplate from Augsburg, master AS, in the Stieglitz Collection, Tel Aviv.

7 On the importance of Augsburg in the introduction of certain ornamental motifs, see C. Hernmarck, *The Art of the European Silversmith 1430-1830*, vol. I, London, 1977, pp. 21-25 and 67-68. It should be mentioned that in southern Germany Torah breastplates of this period generally lack ornamentation.

8 Kayser, op. cit., Pl. XXVI.

9 As noted by Hernmarck, op. cit., p. 67.

10 See *German Domestic Silver of the Eighteenth Century*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1965 (henceforth G.D.S.), figs. 18, 19; this influence is also seen on the bases of spice boxes made by Wolff. See, e.g., Jewish Museum, New York, no. JM 35-52 and F4434, and Isaiah Shachar, *The Feuchtwanger Collection, Jewish Tradition and Art*, The Israel Museum, catalogue no. 78, Jerusalem, 1971, no. 237 (Hebrew, and forthcoming in English).

11 See Renate Scholz, *Goldschmiedearbeiten, Renaissance und Barock*, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, 1974, p. 57. It dates from 1700-1707; see *ibid.*, p. 93. Scholz mentions another wall calendar made by the Augsburg master HPS which may be by Stenglin. There is another breastplate by him in the H.U.C. Skirball Museum, Los Angeles, no. 7.22, which may originally have been a wall calendar.

12 See also G.D.S., fig. 2. The Jewish Museum, New York, possesses Kiddush cups and double beakers made by Poppe with similar ornamentation. See also G.D.S., fig. 11. The same ornament appears on a breastplate in the Jewish Museum, New York; see Kayser, op. cit., no. 47. See also Israel Museum no. 148/24 (Frankfurt, early eighteenth century).

According to the literature, clients played an important part in the design of silver objects they commissioned; see

Hernmarck, vol. I, pp. 67, 68. An important question concerns the role of Jewish clients in the design of ceremonial objects, as it has a direct bearing on their Jewish dimension. Unfortunately, there is little evidence concerning this. An important instance was published by Narkiss in *The Hanukkah Lamp*, Jerusalem, 1939, p. 62 (Hebrew); the example he gives is of a commission for a Torah crown by the Jews of Arles in 1439. Breastplate no. 148/208 of 1744, from the Feuchtwanger Collection, is the only one among those discussed here which shows "influences" of the client; see Shachar, op. cit., no. 173. Here the Jewish client determined certain features of the breastplate, but not necessarily stylistic ones. This breastplate was made by Johann Christoph Drentweit, maker of a Hanukkah lamp in the Jewish Museum, New York, no. JM 17-52.

13 This is worth noting, as the Tables of the Law are one of the generally accepted features of breastplates; but in Nuremberg, too, they became a common motif only from the second half of the eighteenth century. See Barnett, op. cit., no. 142.

16 The hallmarks on this breastplate point to Augsburg, probably in the 1760s. Various features differentiate it from the first group and link it to the second: in the centre, on a scaled background, a seven-branched candelabrum is placed over the frame for the plaques; above are a crown held by rampant lions and an open top with a bell in it.

17 See Silvio Cusin, *Art in the Jewish Tradition*, Milan, 1963 (n. pag.). The date is given there.

18 See also a breastplate from Augsburg of about 1780 in a private collection which is very similar to the Jewish Museum one, in Naftali Rosenan, *Das Jüdische Jahr*, Zurich, 1976, p. 21.

19 A breastplate almost identical to no. 148/71 is Jewish Museum, New York, no. F239, master R³ 1059; according to the Augsburg hallmark, it is of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. A breastplate in the Joseph Stieglitz Collection, Tel Aviv, by Schmadi of the same time also has similar features. It has been difficult to determine conclusively whether the appearance of the seven-branched candelabrum motif here precedes its appearance on other Augsburg Jewish ceremonial art,

though evidence seems to point to this.

20 Formerly in the Feuchtwanger Collection; see *The Charles F. Feuchtwanger Collection of Valuable Jewels*, New York, 1967, no. 403. It is dated there as 1760, and this is repeated in the "Breastplates" article in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. IV, col. 1339-1340.

21 Compare with his other works: *Synagoga, Kultgeräte und Kunstwerke von der Zeit der Patriarchen bis zur Gegenwart*, Recklinghausen, 1, 1960, no. C61; Jewish Museum, New York, nos. D-136, F 4885, F 1982; and two breastplates by him in the Einhorn Collection, Tel Aviv.

22 As far as we know, there is no other breastplate besides that of 1R in which these motifs appear in the same sequence as in Augsburg and with the scaled background.

23 See Jewish Museum, New York, no. F 1804, made by the master Unsin, Augsburg hallmark R³ 306(?); and also there, no. F 3914 made by Schmedding in 1813 (R³ 304), published in A. Kanof, *Ceremonial Art in the Judaic Tradition*, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, 1975, p. 20; and see K. Schilling (ed.), *Monumenta Judaica, 2000 Jahre Geschichte und Kultur der Juden am Rhein*, Cologne, 1963, no. E370, a breastplate from Augsburg of 1806.

24 In contrast to the early breastplate from Munich, which measures 27.2 x 19.1 cm., and weighs 575 g., this Munich breastplate measures 41 x 26.2 cm., and weighs 1,060 g. Augsburg breastplates, too, are particularly heavy — mostly over 1,000 g. — and some are as high as 45 cm. These dimensions are larger than in most Torah breastplates and this is certainly the case in relation to early-eighteenth-century Augsburg examples. In the Museum for Jewish Art at Kiryat Banot, Jerusalem, is another one of this type from Augsburg, made by Stefer.

25 For the only known example of a breastplate from Augsburg of the later period which does not have these motifs, see Barnett, op. cit., no. 143. However, it has a clear architectonic design.