

Majolica Seder Plate

Late 19th–Early 20th Century

Italy

Majolica describes earthenware covered with an opaque tin glaze decorated before firing. Majolica has been produced in Italy since the fifteenth century. Tin-glazed earthenware is known variously as majolica, faience, or fayence, depending upon the country of origin. Large majolica chargers, wall plaques, and figures of saints by the renowned della Robbia family are among the treasures of Italian Renaissance craftsmanship.

According to recent scholarship, this plate is one of a coherent group of twenty-eight majolica Passover plates, all of similar shape, with flanges decorated with elaborate cartouches bearing scenes, and a text (the kiddush or the order of the seder service) in the concave center. These plates are inscribed with a variety of dates and places of origin; the earliest inscribed date is 1532 and the latest 1889. Inscribed places of manufacture include Ancona, Pesaro, Padua, and Urbino.

New research has demonstrated the stylistic uniformity of this group of twenty-eight plates. The overall form and manner of depiction of various scenes is consistent which contrasts with the disparate origins and dates inscribed on the plates, indicating that these works are forgeries. The compositions of the biblical scenes found on these plates are based on the engravings of C. Kirchmayr illustrating a hag-gadah published in Trieste in 1864.

These majolica plates most closely resemble the ceramic wares produced in Savona and neighboring Albisola and were probably produced by the Salamone factory. A plate of this type was known to have been exhibited in London in 1887, and another

example is recorded in a private collection before 1904. On the basis of this evidence, the twenty-eight plates have been dated to the period between 1864 and 1900.

The production of Judaica forgeries in the late nineteenth century indicates the growing interest in the collection of Jewish ceremonial art. The Jewish bourgeoisie in Western and Central Europe was increasingly alienated from traditional Jewish practice yet sought to preserve ties to the past. Purchasing and collecting Jewish art provided assimilated Jews with a sophisticated and distanced mode of connection with their traditional Jewish past. The growing interest in acquiring objects related to Jewish culture led to the creation of forgeries to feed an ever growing market.

Majolica.
Diameter: 16 ¾ in. (42.5 cm).
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
Permanent loan, Mr. and Mrs. Victor Carter,
Los Angeles, 1965.

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