

## Sotheby's Annual Sale of Important Judaica to be held 24 November 2009



A Highly Important Decorated Esther Scroll, Venice, 1564, Estellina, Daughter of Menahem (est. \$600/800,000)

Sotheby's annual sale of *Important Judaica* will be held in New York on 24 November 2009. The sale will comprise a choice offering of Hebrew manuscripts, printed books, paintings, ceremonial metalwork and works of art estimated to bring more than \$3.3 million\*. Works from the sale will be exhibited alongside the annual sale of *Israeli and International Art* at Sotheby's New York galleries beginning 18 November.

Among the selection of Hebrew manuscripts and printed books is the **Oldest Complete Torah Scroll from Spain**, dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, (est. \$300/500,000). This scroll, written nearly 200 years before the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, is one of only a handful of complete pre-expulsion Spanish Torah Scrolls in the world. In addition to the usual adornment of certain letters of the text, the Torah Scroll includes the older kabbalistic schema of “anomalous, curved and spiral letters” described in the ancient scribal manual *Sefer Tagey*, and found in the writings of the venerated Spanish Kabbalist Shem-Tov ibn Gaon. The present work is the only Spanish scroll to include these traditions of “anomalous, curved and spiral letters,” throughout the entirety of the Pentateuchal text.



A **Highly Important Decorated Esther Scroll** completed in Venice in 1564 by Estellina, Daughter of Menahem will also be highlighted (est. \$600/800,000). It is both the earliest complete decorated Esther Scroll and the only known Esther Scroll to have been written by a woman in the pre-modern era. This historically important *megillah* was the precursor to an entire genre whose popularity would continue to expand as the production of decorated Esther Scrolls grew in scope in Italy and Amsterdam in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and then flourished to even greater heights in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries throughout Jewish communities around the world.

A later **Magnificent Illustrated Esther Scroll**, dated circa 1700 Prague is estimated at \$100/120,000. This



exceptionally rare Bohemian scroll features a superb engraved border created by the artist Paul-Jean Franck. In the early 18th century, printers of Hebrew books sought to capitalize on the popularity of decorated *megillot*, and created highly decorative engraved borders to embellish the Esther Scrolls used on the Purim holiday. Recognizing, however, that according to Jewish law, the text of an Esther Scroll must be written by hand, the printers engraved artistic borders onto prepared parchment, and left sufficient blank space within these borders, so that a scribe might insert the biblical text by hand as is the case in this extraordinarily beautiful scroll.

The sale will also comprise a selection of ceremonial silver and metalwork led by an **Important German Parcel-Gilt Silver Hanukah Lamp**, probably Augsburg, circa 1750 (est. \$200/300,000, pictured). The lamp was owned in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century by the prominent Frankfurt antiquarian and collector Selig Meier Goldschmidt, confidant of Baron Carl von Rothschild and patron of Orthodox Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch; the piece is being sold by Goldschmidt's descendants. Other highlights include a **German Silver-Gilt Torah Shield**, Augsburg, circa 1815 (est. \$20/30,000) from the Estate of Dr. M. Dubrowy. Dr. Dubrowy and his wife, Dr. Miriam Schaeffer-Gaertner, began collecting Judaica following World War II and shared a desire to preserve, as much as possible, the remnants of



the once-flourishing European Jewish religious and artistic communities.



The sale will also be highlighted by a fine group of silver and paintings from a Private Austrian Collection, which includes three examples by the Austrian artist Franz Xaver Wolfe and two works by Isidor Kaufmann. Among the works by Kaufmann is a **Portrait of a Rabbi** (est. \$60/80,000), which depicts a pensive and solemn figure in fine detail. Unlike other painters of his generation, Kaufmann revealed the inner spiritual essence and religious life of the Eastern European Jew in his works. Another highlight of the paintings on offer this season is Max Rabes' 1906 picture **The Tomb of Absalom**, which was painted for Kaiser Wilhelm II during a trip to the Holy Land.

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