

Article

Jewish Wedding Rings with Miniature Architecture from Medieval Europe

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Abstract: Among the various types of medieval rings, Jewish wedding rings with miniature architecture have a special significance due to their special form, their importance in the Jewish wedding ceremony and their long tradition that extends from the Middle Ages into present day. This paper will examine their function in the wedding ceremony and their role as part of marriage as a legal transaction and the symbolism of their particular design.

Keywords: Medieval Jewish Studies; Medieval Jewellery; Jewish Ceremonies

1. Introduction

Among the various types of medieval rings, Jewish wedding rings with miniature architecture have a special significance. Due to their special form, their importance in the Jewish wedding ceremony and their long tradition that extends from the Middle Ages into present day. This paper¹ will examine their function in the wedding ceremony and their role as part of marriage as a legal transaction and the symbolism of their particular design.

2. Ceremony

We cannot determine exactly how long rings have been used in the Jewish wedding rite; neither Bible nor Talmud mentions a ring in the wedding ceremony (Lewittes 1994, p. 71). In the Hebrew Bible, there are no regulations or other details about the wedding ritual; the marriage is regarded as a kind of legal transaction, but its concrete form is not described (Gozani and Reiss 2001, p. 21). Only the Mishnah determined the elements of Jewish marriage: the engagement (*erusin*), which was already regarded as a legally binding marriage promise, was followed a year later by the actual marriage (*nissu'in*) (Mehlitz 1992, 148ff., 214ff.; Gozani and Reiss 2001, 21ff). In the course of time, both ceremonies combined: since the Middle Ages *erusin* and *nissu'in*, the promises and their fulfilment, took place on the same day.² The Mishnah also describes in the tractate *Qiddushin* 1.1 how engagement and marriage took place: “A woman is acquired in three ways [. . .]: She is acquired through money, through a contract, or through sexual intercourse. Through money: The House of Shammai says: with a dinar or with the equivalent value of a dinar; and the House of Hillel says: with a perutah or with the equivalent value of a perutah.”³ The Mishnah follows Hillel’s school and determines the symbolic bride price at a perutah, the smallest coin used at that time (Lewittes 1994, p. 71; Gozani and Reiss 2001, p. 22; Gutmann 1987, p. 1) Since the seventh century, this price has been paid in the form of a silver or gold ring in the presence of witnesses by the groom to the bride.⁴ As there are no descriptions of the shape and appearance of these rings, no connection can be made to the early rings with miniature buildings (see above). However, it is noticeable that this type of ring appears at the same time as rings begin to play a role in the Jewish wedding ritual.⁵ Since the tenth/eleventh century at the latest, the use of rings has been an integral part of wedding ceremonies, as evidenced by Jews from Islamic countries (Goitein 1978, p. 70, 86ff., p. 95). This tradition spread throughout all Ashkenaz in the Middle Ages (Lewittes 1994, p. 71). Since the Middle Ages, the Jewish law (*halakhah*) had defined that the ring could only be



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made of pure gold without gemstones (Abrahams 2009, p. 198; Chadour 1994, vol. 2, p. 323; Putik 1994, p. 82; Lewittes 1994, p. 72). The description of an Ashkenazi marriage dates back to 1400 and tells us more about this procedure. A pupil of Rabbi Jacob ha-Levi Molin (acronym Maharil; ca. 1375–1427), portrays the ceremonial act thus: “Then the Rabbi sang the blessings of betrothal; when he had finished, he called for two witnesses, showed them the ring, and asked, ‘You see this ring, do you think it has some value?’, ‘Yes’ answered the witnesses. [. . .] Then he bade the witnesses observe that the bridegroom wedded the bride with the formula: *Behold thou art consecrated unto me by this ring according to the Law of Moses and of Israel*. Thereupon the bridegroom placed the ring on the forefinger of the bride’s right hand.”⁶ This is exactly what an illumination from the Second Nuremberg Haggadah (around 1470) shows (Figure 1).⁷ Illustrating the marriage of Moses to Zipporah, it shows a contemporary wedding scene from the 15th century. The bridegroom and bride, who has adorned her loose hair with a diadem, stand opposite each other and the man is about to put a very large, simple hoop on the outstretched index finger of the woman’s right hand. According to Ashkenazi custom, the long tip (cornette) of the groom’s soft cap (chaperon) is placed on the bride’s head.⁸ The couple is flanked by two witnesses, one holding a cup. As a symbol (and part?) of the bride price the ring was kept by the wife. This is already reported by Maharil, who writes that the women used to keep their wedding rings “for many years because of love” (Satz 1979, p. 50, No. 52).



Figure 1. Medieval wedding scene from the Second Nuremberg Haggadah (around 1470), © David Sofer Collection London.

3. Legal Transaction

The naming or depiction of the witnesses illustrates that the handing over of the ring was not only a symbolic act, but also a legal transaction. The ring came into the bride’s possession when she attached it to her finger and it had to have a certain value, to which witnesses testified. For this reason, it was customary that the ring was made of pure gold without gemstones, because most people like the witnesses and the bride would not have been able to ascertain the real value of a (precious) stone.⁹ Value and material of the ring were therefore repeatedly the subject of rabbinical legal opinions, both in Ashkenaz and in Sepharad.¹⁰

Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (acronym: Rashi; ca. 1040–1105) decided, for example, that a marriage is valid also with a (gold-plated) silver ring, as the given ring has a certain value—even if the bride did not know that it was not a gold ring.¹¹ This decision contradicts the custom that the ring should be made of gold. Rabbi Mordekhai Kimhi from southern France (13th/14th century), on the other hand, describes a case in Narbonne in which a decision was made to the contrary, as the wife saw herself deceived: despite the custom that the ring should be made of gold, the groom had a ring made of silver and gilded, but did not inform the bride of this. She assumed that the shiny gold ring was really made of gold and even though the groom had never claimed this, Mordekhai Kimhi decided that it was a deception, since the custom was to make a gold ring and the bride could therefore

assume that it was a gold ring. Unlike in Ashkenazi law, the marriage was not legally valid; it had to be repeated! (von Mutius 1991, 158f)

However, Rabbi Mordekhai Kimhi's legal opinion also states that the main deception in this case was that the bridegroom had not informed the bride that the ring was made of gilded silver. So one can assume that rings made of (gilded) silver were permissible as long as they had the minimum value of one perutah and if the bride's parents and the bride were informed and had agreed about the cheaper material Cf. also (Singer 1925, p. 428). The ring from the treasure of Weißenfels (see below) proves this impressively. It consists of formerly gilded silver, and its quite simple execution also indicates a not-very-wealthy purchaser. The Erfurt wedding ring (see below), on the other hand, is of highest quality, both in terms of its craftsmanship and the fineness of the gold used. At 23 grams, its value corresponded to about 6.5 gulden.¹² However, it was probably only part of the bride's money. By the second half of the 14th century, for example, a bride's money worth 600 gulden was customary in the municipality of Mainz¹³, which corresponds to about a hundred times of the value of the Erfurt Ring.

According to Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg (acronym: Maharam of Rothenburg; ca. 1215–2 May 1293), the marriage is even valid if a ring made of copper was used: "Since A said: 'I betroth thee with this ring', and not 'with this ring of gold', the betrothal was valid."¹⁴ However, if the witnesses and even a goldsmith declared that the ring was made of gold, but six months later it was discovered that it was a copper ring, the marriage was void.¹⁵ As for Mordekhai Kimhi, also for Meir of Rothenburg the false statement was more decisive for the annulment of the connection than the actual material.

In the fifteenth century, Rabbi Israel Bruna ben Hayyim from Brünn (ca. 1400–ca. 1480) prescribed the use of rings made of pure material: the ring should be either of gold or of silver, and not of silver and gilded on the surface.¹⁶ A temporal development may be indicated here, perhaps also as a reaction to previous cases in which the rings used subsequently turned out to be problematic and which led to the decisions already discussed. For Rashi in the 11th century, the value of the ring was decisive for the legal validity of the wedding and in the 13th/14th century gilded rings were also in use, as the Weißenfels find proves and Rabbi Mordekhai Kimhi's opinion confirms, Rabbi Israel Bruna in the fifteenth century emphasizes the necessary purity of the material, probably to be able to better estimate the value of the ring. For him, the mixing of different materials seems to have been problematic.

The legal validity of a wedding was also determined by the correct form of the ceremony, the presence of witnesses and especially the visibility of the ring during the ceremony. This is probably reflected in the size and unusual shape of the ring bezel of the surviving medieval rings (see below), which ensured that the ring was noticed by witnesses during the ceremony. It is certainly also for this reason that the rings were depicted particularly large in the few known wedding depictions of the Middle Ages. In the mentioned scene from the Second Nuremberg Haggadah (c. 1470), the bridegroom puts a very large, undecorated ring on the outstretched index finger of her right hand¹⁷ and in the only Ashkenazic marriage contract (*ketubbah*) from Krems in Austria (1391/92) that survives from the Middle Ages, the floral-ornamental border illumination also indicates the handing over of the ring: the bride and groom are separated by the text; the bride, adorned with a crown, stretches her right arm towards the groom, who seems to be handing her a very large ring. The head of the ring is very pronounced and illuminated in red.¹⁸ The importance of the visibility of the ring during the ceremony is also shown by a decision of Maharam of Rothenburg: In a drinking hall in Esslingen, where young men and young ladies were drinking and partying, one of the ladies, Gonna, was fooling around and asked a young man to betroth her. The young man, Nathan, borrowed a ring, threw it into her lap and pronounced the engagement formula. Maharam of Rothenburg was asked if Gonna needed a divorce and decided that she did not: since the witnesses did not see the ring fall into Gonna's lap, no betrothal took place.¹⁹

Another reason for the invalidity of this “marriage” could have been that the young man had only borrowed the ring. The ownership was a very important determinant of the ring, as Rabbi Moses ben Isaac ha-Levi Minz (acronym: Maharam Minz; ca. 1420–1482) stated (Domb 1991, vol. 2, pp. 536–537, no. 109): according to Jewish Law (*halakhah*), the wedding ring had to be the property of the bridegroom before the marriage. Otherwise, the marriage entered into with the ring is not valid. This is also underlined by the regularly recurring discussion about loaned or borrowed rings: Rabbi Abraham ben David von Posquières (acronym: Ra’vad; ca. 1125–1198) already discussed in the twelfth century the question whether a borrowed ring may be used in a wedding ceremony. While some rabbis say that a wedding ceremony with a borrowed ring is invalid because the ring, which is part of the legal transaction, must later be returned to the lender, Rabbi Abraham believes that this is not the case. He considers the husband as someone who embezzled a borrowed object and decides that the lender can take recourse against the borrower, who only has to reimburse the lender for the monetary value of the ring. Thus, the ring can remain in the possession of the wife and the marriage is valid. The transfer of the ring from the property of the groom to the property of the bride was therefore fundamentally necessary for the marriage to be valid (von Mutius 1991, 37f). Furthermore, this was only possible if the ring was the groom’s property before the ceremony. On the other hand, Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel (1250–1327, Germany, later Spain) reports that it was the custom in Ashkenaz to perform the marriage with a borrowed ring. He considers this custom problematic and tries to find a justification. However, he validates the *kidushin* only if it was already done, but as a rule, he would not allow a marriage with a borrowed ring.²⁰ Rabbi Israel Isserlein from Austria (ca. 1390–1460) quotes this responsum, although he does not seem to know this custom in the fifteenth century, there is a possibility it was no longer customary due to the legal problems.²¹ Rabbi Maharam Minz describes another case concerning a wedding in the fifteenth century in detail (Domb 1991, vol. 2, pp. 213–17, no. 49a): the bridegroom’s father had received the ring as a pledge and took it to the goldsmith to make it look like new and then gave it to his son. During the ceremony, the rabbi who performed the ceremony asked the father if he had gifted the ring to his son. The father affirmed this—which was a lie because the ring did not belong to him at all! According to Maharam Minz, the marriage celebrated with this ring was invalid, and the bride and groom must remarry.

As it has been shown, *responsa* that name betrothal or wedding rings often deal with questions regarding the value and ownership of the rings used for the wedding ceremony, which corresponds to the above-mentioned regulations on the use of rings in rituals.²² Additionally, in the early publications on Jewish rituals and customs from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the ritual is described quite similarly to the one depicted around the year 1400 (see above).²³ Rings were an integral part of the wedding ceremony and, at the same time, are part of the legal act of marriage and did not only need to have a fixed value: only when the ring passed from the groom’s to the bride’s property did the marriage become legally valid.

According to the legal principles described above, any simple gold ring (according to some Rabbis also silver, silver-gilded or even copper rings; see above) could actually serve as a wedding ring during the ceremony. Certainly, such simple rings have been used for this purpose since the Middle Ages at the latest. However, these—if they have survived at all—cannot be identified as wedding rings if they had no corresponding markings. Apart from the prohibition of the use of precious stones,²⁴ there is no specific regulation that provides information about the appearance of these rings. Nor do any of the surviving sources describe the rings used in the ceremony in more detail—with one exception: in a legal opinion by Rabbi Moshe Minz, a ring with the engraved Hebrew inscription מ"ט, the abbreviation for *mazal tov* is mentioned as early as the fifteenth century.²⁵ The only known rings with inscriptions like that are rings with miniature architecture as a bezel, as we know them since the Middle Ages (see below). Therefore, these rings can be clearly identified as Jewish wedding rings.²⁶ This type has the longest verifiable tradition.

4. Stylistic Development

The first motif predecessors of wedding rings with miniature buildings date back to late Roman times.²⁷ From the sixth to the eighth century, Merovingian architectural rings with simple little houses carrying pointed or dome-shaped roofs are known from France and Italy (Taburet-Delahaye 1999, p. 19, figs. 4, 5; Hindman 2015, pp. 112, 206, no. 25, 26). The motif is repeated on contemporaneous Greek, Byzantine²⁸ and East Germanic rings (Chadour 1994, vol. 1, p. 151, no. 507). The Victoria and Albert Museum in London also preserves two similar gold rings from the same period.²⁹ Whether these early rings had special functions and which ones they might have has not yet been determined by scholarship. A Jewish background is not excluded for these early rings, even if the rings do not bear Hebrew inscriptions. At the same time, since the seventh or eighth century, other rings with similar appearances can be found in the Jewish wedding ceremony (see below). It is also conceivable that this early type (whether Jewish or not) was adapted by the European Jews in the course of the Middle Ages and developed into the typical Jewish ring form.

Thus far, only four Jewish wedding rings from the Middle Ages are known³⁰ and all of them bearing miniature buildings as bezels.³¹ The oldest example is the golden ring from the Colmar treasure, discovered in 1863.³² (Figure 2) The narrow hoop with lion heads on the ring shoulders supports a small, six-sided building with surrounding round-arched arcades made of twisted gold wire. On the roof of the six-sided miniature building, six Hebrew letters appear in front of alternating red opaque and formerly green translucent enamel: טוב מזל. They form the inscription *mazal tov*, which literally means “good star” and in a figurative sense “good luck,” a traditional congratulation at Ashkenazi weddings.³³ Its compact form with round arches is still associated with the thirteenth century, but the use of green translucent enamel on the roof surfaces suggests its origin in the early fourteenth century, probably soon after 1300.³⁴



Figure 2. Jewish Wedding Ring, Colmar Treasure (around 1300), © B. Stefan, Thuringian State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology.

Another ring of that type originates from the Erfurt treasure³⁵ dates from the second quarter of the fourteenth century (Figure 3). The ring is 4.7 cm high (Stürzebecher 2010, p. 220), weighs 23 grams and consists of 85–88% pure gold (Mecking 2010, p. 95), which corresponds to a fineness of 850–880. Today a fineness of 585 or 750 is common for jewellery.

In comparison with other medieval jewellery, the Erfurt wedding ring is also characterised by an unusually high gold content, which probably reflects its special significance in the rite (Mecking 2010, p. 62). With its six-sided structure and surrounding arcades, it is typologically very similar to the Colmar Ring. The finely crafted Gothic architecture of the bezel, carried by two winged dragons, captivates with its filigree execution with miniature tracery. The composition of the bezel is six-sided with identical sides: a triangular gable with an inscribed trifoil rises above pointed arcades. Each gable is crowned by a finial and flanked by pinnacles.³⁶ On the ridge point of the hexagonal tent roof, there is a spherical, six-sided knob. Six Hebrew letters are engraved on the smooth roof surfaces: מזל טוב (Figure 4).³⁷ The lower side of the ring is decorated with two clasped hands. We know this motif as a symbol of marital fidelity from contemporary Christian love and wedding rings.³⁸ Inside the little house there is a small golden ball that generates a bright, gentle sound when moved.



Figure 3. Jewish Wedding Ring, Erfurt Treasure (first half of 14th Century), © B. Stefan, Thuringian State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology.



Figure 4. Jewish Wedding Ring, Erfurt Treasure (first half of 14th Century), © B. Stefan, Thuringian State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology.

The ring from the Weißenfels find of 1826³⁹ is close in time to the Erfurt ring, although it is much simpler and of less quality in its execution (Figure 5). The smooth, narrow hoop carries a small building with a simple saddle roof and ogival arcades all around, the gable sides with an inscribed tri-pass. The engraved inscription *mazal tov* can also be found on the roof. Inside the little house—similar to the Erfurt Ring—there is a small piece of silver plate that clatters when it moves.



Figure 5. Jewish Wedding Ring, Weißenfels Treasure (first half of 14th Century), © B. Stefan, Thuringian State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology.

With its tower-like, high pinnacles above the very small house and the flanking volutes, a golden ring from the Wittelsbach treasure chamber in Munich marks the transition period from late Gothic to Renaissance (around 1500). This ring is already described in the inventory of 1585 as an old golden ring, which instead of a stone is made as a small turret, with five points; on the sides there are several Hebrew letters: *ein alter [. . .] guldener Ring, welcher an statt des Stains gemacht, als ein claines Thürml, mit 5 Spiizen, auf den seithen seind etlich hebereische Buochstaben* (Glaser 1980, p. 196). The inscription *mazal tov* is placed on the inside of the hoop.

From later periods, Jewish wedding rings with small buildings are more often handed down—always worked and decorated according to the prevailing fashions. During the Renaissance, the building adopted antique forms; in Baroque times, the prohibition of precious stones was circumvented by the rich use of coloured enamel; in nineteenth-century Historism, among other things one reverts to high medieval models⁴⁰ and until today, rings of this type are used at (Ashkenazi) weddings.⁴¹

5. Type and Motif

Rings of this type with miniature buildings as ring heads represent one of the main types of Jewish wedding rings. With the examples from Colmar, Weißenfels and Erfurt, this type has the longest verifiable tradition in Central Europe, dating back at least to the Middle Ages. These rings have a typically Jewish design, each adapted to the prevailing time and regional style. Although microarchitecture is a common phenomenon in medieval goldsmithing (Timmermann Forthcoming), there are no Christian rings with similar motifs since the Middle Ages.⁴² Thus, as original Jewish works of art, they represent a very special feature. Typical of this type of ring is the Hebrew inscription *mazal tov*, which can be found on the roof of the rings from Colmar, Erfurt and Weißenfels and on the inside of the hoop of the somewhat younger one in Munich. A ring with the engraved Hebrew inscription *mazal tov* is mentioned as early as the fifteenth century in a legal opinion by Rabbi Moshe Minz.⁴³ Two of the three fourteenth century rings also have another feature in common: a golden ball or a small piece of silver plate inside the miniature building enabled the rings from Erfurt and Weißenfels to produce a sound when moved, possibly drawing additional attention to the ceremony or the bride.⁴⁴

With this, in addition to their elaborate design, the visible Hebrew inscription and the special symbolism of the miniature architecture (see below), the main effect of the rings was aimed outwards and was directed at the witnesses and guests present at the wedding. Thus, putting the ring on the bride's right index finger during the wedding ceremony can be seen as a performative act, the effect of which was intensified by the visual, but also the acoustic stimulus that the specially designed ring evoked. In addition, there was the tactile stimulus emanating from the ring, obviously, which first had an effect on the groom and then on the bride when it was put on her finger. This special relationship of medieval jewellery to the body of the wearer is highlighted by Silke Tammen, who emphasises that religious and profane jewellery not only attracted glances and touches but was also intended to have an effect on the body of the wearer (Tammen 2015, p. 317). Of course, the Jewish wedding rings also had this immediate effect on the body of the wearer and the inscription *mazal tov*—good luck was addressed to the bride and groom. However, these rings were worn exclusively during the wedding, as described above, and kept afterwards as part of the bride's money. The shape and material of the rings thus seem to have been designed for a one-off, but have the maximum effect during the ceremony, which is certainly the reason for the special design. The size and the shape of the ring bezel ensured that the ring was perceived by witnesses during the ceremony—an important factor for the validity of the ceremony (see above). The sound that emanated from some of the rings increased the perceptibility and thus also supported the legal validity of the marriage.

6. Commemoration of the Destruction of the Temple

Typical for Jewish wedding rings is the design of the bezel in the form of a miniature building. The structure is reminiscent of the *bimot* known from medieval synagogues,⁴⁵ which may also have been the place of the wedding ceremony.⁴⁶ Furthermore, there are different interpretations of the motif: as the new house of the newlyweds, as a synagogue or as the temple of Solomon. However, the identification with the Second Temple in Jerusalem, destroyed by Titus in 70 CE, is most likely.⁴⁷ The longing for Jerusalem and the temple was common to all Jews living in the Diaspora and is reflected in their art. Thus, temple depictions have been found since the Middle Ages in various illuminated Hebrew manuscripts and very frequently in Jewish marriage contracts, the *ketubbot* (Seidmann 1984, p. 42; Sabar 2000, p. 45). There, the representation of the temple served to preserve the memory of the destruction of the holy city at various events in the cycle of life (Sabar 2000, p. 46)—also and especially on the (hopefully) most joyful day in life.⁴⁸ For the same reason, the motif is probably to be found on the wedding rings as well.

The temple is usually depicted in the *ketubbot* (as on many wedding rings) as a polygonal central building resembling the Dome of the Rock. The Crusaders thought they recognised the Templum Domini in this imposing building from the seventh century and brought its depiction to Europe on Crusader maps. It found its way into European art as a fairly uniform motif for centuries (Weiss 1998; Sabar 2000, p. 48). Thus, the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem has been depicted in the form of the Dome of the Rock in both Christian and Jewish works of art since the eleventh century: The *Bible moralisée* from the 13th century and Schedel's *World Chronicle* from 1492 show a dome-crowned central building, as do the illuminations of Jewish manuscripts (Kirschbaum and Bandmann 1994, p. 258; Sabar 2000, 48f). This representation may also have influenced the shape of Jewish wedding rings.

With the use of the motif on the wedding rings, the wedding can be placed directly in this context. According to the Torah, the union of the newlyweds and their life together is figuratively compared to the building of a small temple (*miqdash me'at*) (Hackenbroch 1979, p. 50; Chadour 1994, vol. 2, p. 324). Additionally, this motif appears in liturgical poetry. For *Shabbat Chatan*, the Shabbat before the wedding, a large number of *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) has been transmitted through which the bridegroom was honoured in his call to the congregation to read the Torah (Hollender 2013, p. 54). In the *piyyutim* for *Shabbat Chatan* by the poets Elasar ha-Qallir and Amitai ben Shefatya, the wedding room is directly associated with the temple (Lieber 2014, pp. 281, 295). Thus, the wedding can be interpreted as a symbolic rebuilding of the destroyed temple, symbolised by the design of the wedding rings in the form of small temples.

7. Conclusions

Even though neither Bible nor Talmud mention the use of rings within the wedding ceremony, it has a very long tradition. At least since the Middle Ages, the giving of the ring was an integral part of weddings in Ashkenaz. The ring symbolised the bridal price and was thus a very important part of the legal transaction that marriage also represented. For this reason, rabbinic legal opinions repeatedly deal with the ownership, value and material of the used rings.

According to Jewish customs, the ring should (actually) be made of gold, but silver, copper or other materials were also used. There were no further regulations on appearance and form. Only one responsum by Maharam Minz from the fifteenth century mentions the inscription *mazal tov* on a wedding ring. Rings with this inscription in Hebrew letters have been known since the early fourteenth century: these are rings with miniature buildings as the ring bezel, the oldest known ones come from the treasure of Colmar, Weißenfels and Erfurt. This type of wedding ring thus has the longest known tradition, which extends to the present day: rings of this type are still used in wedding ceremonies today. With their typically Jewish design vocabulary, adapted to the prevailing style of the time and region, the rings with miniature architecture represent a unique phenomenon as original Jewish works of art.

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Notes

- ¹ This paper brings together the results of my research on Jewish wedding rings with miniature architecture in the Middle Ages, some of which have already been published (Stürzebecher; Stürzebecher 2020), based on the chapter on the Jewish wedding ring from the Erfurt Treasure in the author's dissertation: (Stürzebecher 2010). I thank Andreas Lehnertz (Jerusalem) for reading drafts of the paper and his helpful comments, and Eyal Levinson (Jerusalem) and Vladislav Zeev Slepoy (Halle), who provided me additionally with help in accessing and understanding the relevant rabbinic legal opinions.
- ² There were both economic, since only one celebration had to be financed, and social reasons for this: the simultaneity of *erusin* and *nissu'in* minimized the uncertainty for the bride. (Baumgarten 2013, 216f). See also (Grossmann 2004, p. 49; De Vries 1984, 203ff., p. 223; Mehlitz 1992, pp. 154, 218; Gozani and Reiss 2001, p. 24).
- ³ Mishnah Qiddushin 1:1. (Krupp, 2). Cf. also (Gozani and Reiss 2001, p. 21; Mehlitz 1992, p. 141, 152ff.) Mehlitz indicates here the pure symbolism of the appropriation of the bride, since only a meaningless sum of money was to be exchanged.
- ⁴ (Singer 1925), 10:428. See also (Chadour 1994, vol. 2, p. 323; Putik 1994, p. 82; Lewittes 1994, p. 71; Gozani and Reiss 2001, p. 29). In Christianity, too, initially only the handing over of a ring to the bride was customary, but since the 13th century, probably under the influence of the church, this was replaced by the exchange of rings. (Stevenson 1982, p. 53; Deneke 1991, col. 61); cf. also (Cherry 1981, p. 59). In Byzantium, two rings were already common since the 11th century, a gold one for the bride, a silver one for the groom. (Stevenson 1982, p. 100). In contrast, rings play no role during marriages in medieval Islamic society. (Rapoport 2005).
- ⁵ The handing over of the ring originally took place in the context of the engagement, therefore some authors speak of "engagement rings" for rings of the type examined here; e.g., (Abrahams 2009, p. 197; Lewittes 1994, 71ff). Since in the Middle Ages *erusin* and *nissu'in* were celebrated in a ceremony, the term "wedding ring" seems more meaningful to me.
- ⁶ Quote according (Abrahams 2009, p. 222); Cf. (Spitzer 1989, pp. 466–67). There are no indications as to why the index finger was chosen for the ceremony. Possibly this was done in distinction to the Christian ritual: here the ring was traditionally placed on the fourth finger of the left hand, which was believed to have a vein leading directly to the heart. (Stevenson 1982, p. 53; Rapisarda 2006, 177ff).
- ⁷ David Sofer Collection London, formerly: Schocken Institute for Jewish Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America Jerusalem, Ms. 24087, fol. 12v. (Gutmann 1970, p. 314, fig. 22; Metzger and Metzger 1983, p. 237, fig. 344).
- ⁸ This custom is also mentioned by Maharil: (Spitzer 1989, p. 466). The use of a wedding canopy (huppah) is only attested since the early 16th century. For the earliest extant depiction of a huppah, see (Wolfthal 2004, p. 115, fig. 61).
- ⁹ Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel (13th cent., German lands), Comments on Qiddushin § 488. Also compare Shulhan 'Arukh, Even ha-'ezer 31,2 and (Abrahams 2009, 198f).
- ¹⁰ Since the Middle Ages, Ashkenaz has referred to Northern Europe and the German-speaking world, Sepharad to the Iberian Peninsula.
- ¹¹ (Elfenbein 1943, p. 222), Responsum 198.
- ¹² 1 Gulden = 3.5 g gold; see (Kluge 2004, 12f).
- ¹³ (Steiman 1963, p. 49). All over Ashkenazic areas in the Middle Ages the bride money was very high and was supposed to secure the wife and the whole family after the death of the husband, and also in the case of divorce.; see (Baumgarten 2018, 449f). Cf. also (Tallan 1989, p. 93; Tallan 1991, p. 66).
- ¹⁴ (Agus 1947, p. 308) (Even Haezer, no. 275).
- ¹⁵ (Agus 1947, 308f). (Even Haezer, no. 276).
- ¹⁶ She'elot u-teshuvot [...] Yista'el mi-Bruna' (Jerusalem 1987) 71, Resp. 94.
- ¹⁷ See note 7.
- ¹⁸ This is the only more accurate depiction of a Jewish wedding ring in the Middle Ages; all other illuminations have in common that the rings are always only schematically depicted as a simple hoop. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Wien, Cod. Hebr. 218. (Keil 2006, 37f.; Metzger and Metzger 1983, p. 237, fig. 342).
- ¹⁹ (Levinson 2022, 121f.; Baumgarten et al. 2022, pp. 19–20; Agus 1947, p. 44, 300f). (Even Haezer, no. 268).
- ²⁰ Asher b. Jechiel, She'elot u-teshuvot (Jerusalem 1994) § 35, 156.
- ²¹ (Avitan 1991, p. 154) (No. 210).
- ²² On the other hand, there is no evidence to support the assertion put forward by various authors that wedding rings were owned by Jewish communities. Cf. for example on community wedding rings without indication of sources: (Kanof 1970, p. 199; Chadour 1994, vol. 2, p. 323; Wener 2005, p. 31; or Heimann-Jelinek 2006, p. 96). Joseph Gutmann even fundamentally doubted the authenticity of a number of preserved wedding rings: (Gutmann 2002). He also considers the rings from the Colmar and Weißenfels treasures to be modern works or forgeries of the 19th century. However, the context, content, and

history of both treasure finds clearly speak for their authenticity, which is further confirmed by the investigation of the Erfurt treasure. For the similarities of the treasures mentioned, see (Stürzebecher 2010, 185ff). There you find also brief descriptions, find history, and further literature on Colmar (pp. 169ff.) and Weißenfels (pp. 165ff.). Modern imitation could also be ruled out in material-analytical and technological comparisons. Cf. Pasch (2010) and Mecking (2010).

(Buxtorf 1643; Schudt 1715, 3f.; Kirchner 1734; Bodenschatz 1748, p. 125). Schudt mentions in this context that wedding rings usually bear the inscription *mazal tov*. This mention was regarded as the earliest written proof, but such an inscription was already noted in the above mentioned responsum by Maharam Minz in the 15th century and the preserved rings from Colmar, Erfurt, Weißenfels, and Munich as material evidence of this custom show that this inscription was already in use in 13th/14th century.

See note 9.

(Domb 1991, vol. 1, p. 279, no.70). See also (Noy 2021, p. 89).

Even though some authors deny the use of rings with miniature architecture as wedding rings. They mostly refer to the halakhic rule that undecorated rings are to be used. For example, (Sperber 2008, p. 158), writes: "Patently, these rings were not intended to effect the actual betrothal, because the halakha requires a ring without any stone, engraving, name or plating", citing Shulhan Arukh, Even ha-Ezer 31. But Even ha-Ezer 31, §2 only says: "[...] we have the custom to marry with a ring that has no stone" (Shulhan Arukh, Even ha-Ezer 31,2.) and mentions neither engraving, name or plating. Daniel Sperber even suggests that two types of rings may have played a role within the wedding ceremony: a simple, unadorned one for the actual marriage and an elaborately decorated one for the public ritual (Sperber 2008, 163ff.). But there is no indication of such a use of two types of rings in any of the known sources.

Cf. for example a Syrian ring of the 3rd century CE in the Kunstgewerbemuseum Cologne, which carries a temple-like, square structure with a set stone as a bezel: (Chadour and Joppien 1985, 78, no. 103).

Cf. to this, inter alia, (Ward 1981, 49f., no. 104; Seidmann 1984, p. 41; and Chadour 1994, vol.1, p. 147, nos. 495f).

Both rings (Inv.-Nr. 863-1871 and 864-1871) are mentioned by (Keen 1991), 80, as Jewish wedding rings. The dating to the 16th or 18th century proposed there seems to be arbitrary. An investigation by Marian Campbell, formerly Victoria and Albert Museum, and John Cherry, formerly British Museum, together with the author on 20 February 2009, resulted in a classification in the 6th–8th century.

According to the author, a golden ring from a private collection dated by Vivian Mann before 1348 is not medieval. Cf. (Mann 2016, pp. 144–46, no. 62a; Mann 2018, p. 182; Mann 2020, p. 88, fig. 36).

With the exception of the ring from the Wittelsbach treasury, all the wedding rings discussed come from treasure finds that were hidden during the wave of pogroms in the mid-14th century. See in detail (Stürzebecher 2010, especially p. 156f., pp. 165–71).

C.f. (Leroy 1999; Drake Boehm 2020; Stürzebecher 2010, pp. 169–71).

This inscription can be found on the majority of Jewish wedding rings, both from the Middle Ages and subsequent centuries. Cf. to this, inter alia, (Seidmann 1984, p. 41).

For the rings from the treasures of Colmar, Weißenfels, and the treasure chamber of the Wittelsbacher in Munich, see (Stürzebecher 2010, 95f. and 278) (Verg. Kat. Nr. 36, 37, and 38) with detailed literature.

On the excavation in the Michaelisstraße in Erfurt, see (Sczech 2010).

The artistic reference to contemporary architecture is typical for a large complex of Gothic goldsmiths' art. Pointed arches and tracery structure rings and belt fittings, monstrances, reliquaries, or ciboria. The individual elements were serially formed into patrices and soldered together. This working method was common in the 14th century and made it possible to produce various objects from a repertoire of individual parts. The Erfurt wedding ring also consists of 20 soldered individual parts. (Pasch 2010, p. 273).

The letters do not correspond to the actual form of proper Hebrew letters. This could indicate the execution by Christian goldsmiths, who seem to have engraved the inscription according to a pattern and unaware of Hebrew letters. The same is true for the inscription on the roof of the wedding ring from Weißenfels which is amateurishly executed. However, in medieval Europe there is also evidence of Jews practicing the goldsmith's craft and certainly making wedding rings. Cf. (Lehnertz and Stürzebecher).

Already since late Roman times, engagement and wedding rings often bear the motif of clasped hands (*dextrarum iunctio*) (cf. e.g., (Bassermann-Jordan 1909, 37, fig. 43; Johns 1996, 63, fig. 3.24, 25; Scarisbrick 2021, p. 16), which was very popular in Central Europe for a long time. For example, a 12th century ring from the Lark Hill find in the British Museum (Cherry 1981, 59f., no. 114; Zarnecki 1984, p. 293, no. 320 f. with fig.) shows the plastically executed clasped hands, as does a whole series of simple 13th century rings from the Fuchsenhof treasure find. The motif here is partly worked plastically, partly only engraved (Krabath and Bühler 2004, 276 ff., 562 ff., 588 f., no. 249–262, 272). Other examples include a 13th/14th century German love ring in the Bavarian National Museum in Munich (Steingräber 1956, p. 47, fig. 63; Haimerl 1999, p. 109 with fig.), two rings from excavations in Amsterdam, pewter and copper, 16th century (Baart 1977, 213 f., no. 390 f.), a 16th century gold finger ring from Italy (Chadour and Joppien 1985, p. 155, no. 242), or two German silver rings from the second half of the 19th century (Chadour and Joppien 1985, 194f., no. 305, 306). The 14th century Jewish wedding ring from the Erfurt treasure also uses the motif of the *dextrarum iunctio* on its ring band and combines it with the motif of the miniature building. Unlike in Central and Western Europe, where

this motif is limited to the depiction of clasped hands, Byzantine rings of the 5th to 8th centuries show figural depictions of the *dextrarum iunctio* with the bride and groom and Christ in the role of Concordia on their ring plate, such as an early 8th century wedding ring from Abuqir Bay, Egypt (Petrina 2012). Other Byzantine wedding rings show only the portrait of the bride and groom (see Ward 1981, p. 47, no. 100; Walker 2002; Hindman 2015, pp. 132, 209, 217, no. 32, 48). However, as in Judaism (see above), simple, unadorned rings were certainly used as wedding rings too. For example, an illustration of the life of St. Alexius in the St Albans Psalter of Christina of Markyate, 12th century, on p. 57 shows the saint presenting giving his wife “a plain golden ring with a single dark stone” (van Houts 2019, p. 80).

See, among others, (Dräger 2001) or (Stürzebecher 2010, pp. 165–68).

Cf. for a detailed discussion of this type and other forms of Jewish wedding rings: (Stürzebecher 2010, 96f). It is striking that some of the wedding rings of the 19th century are strongly reminiscent of medieval rings, which suggests that in the 19th century medieval rings of this type may still have been available as originals. Wedding rings of the preceding centuries, on the other hand, do not show any medieval forms, but were designed according to the style of the time (see above), so there was neither continuity nor conservatism in the manufacturing method. A particularly conspicuous example is a golden Jewish wedding ring from the Cologne City Museum, which seems to copy the Erfurt wedding ring in its execution, but which, according to material analysis, was not made until after 1820: (Mecking et al. 2018).

Among others, from the British jewellery designer Chloe Lee Carson, who reports in her blog on how she developed new interpretations of this ring type for her own wedding, based on historical ring forms, and now also sells them: <http://www.chloeecarson.co.uk/blog/2014/10/23/my-engagement-ring-story-reviving-the-jewish-house-ring> (accessed on 08 August 2022).

In Christianity, too, initially only the handing over of a ring to the bride was common, it was replaced by the exchange of rings since the 13th century. See note 4. Since late Roman times, engagement and wedding rings often carry the motif of clasped hands (*dextrarum iunctio*). See note 38.

cf. note 38.

It is possible that the Colmar Ring originally had a similar device. Analyses show that the roof was glued on secondarily after it was found, probably as early as the 19th century (Pasch 2010, p. 277). Perhaps a responsum by Meir of Rothenburg already refers to such a ring in the 13th century. It deals with the question of whether it is permissible to wear a ring on Shabbat that encloses a loose stone or piece of sheet metal in a hollow space so that it emits a ringing sound when moved. Rabbi Meir says that a person is not permitted to make musical sounds on Shabbat, especially if they serve a specific purpose. However, since the ring does not make a musical sound or serve a useful purpose, it is permitted to wear it on Shabbat. (Agus 1947), 182 (Orah Hayim no. 40).

For example, in Cologne (Potthoff and Wiehen 2019, fig. on title; Grellert and Ristow 2021) or Erfurt (Altwasser 2009, 58 ff., with further examples for comparison).

(Keil 2004, p. 326; Feuchtwanger-Sarig 2022, p. 290); See also (Hollender 2013, p. 58). Usually weddings took place in the synagogue courtyard. (Lehnertz 2020, p. 39; Cohen and Horowitz 1990, 229ff).

For example, (Abrahams 2009, p. 198). For a detailed discussion of the motif, see (Stürzebecher 2010, p. 96).

The tradition of breaking a glass in the course of the wedding ceremony has also been a reminder of the destruction of the temple since the end of the 13th century at the latest. (Feuchtwanger 1985, p. 35; Goldberg 2003, p. 149). Jacob Z. Lauterbach, however, suspects an older origin of this ceremony in the protection against demons during marriage, which was only later reinterpreted as a commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem. (Lauterbach 1970, pp. 340–69). (Goldberg 2003, 150ff.), also discusses other possible interpretations of the ritual.

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