

NORTH CAROLINA

Museum of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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N.C. Museum of Art Receives Esther Scroll and Case Made for Jewish Community in Ottoman Empire

RALEIGH, N.C.—An Esther Scroll (or Megillah) and Case from the Ladino Jewish community in 19th-century Turkey is one of the newest additions to the North Carolina Museum of Art's Judaic Art Gallery. Dr. and Mrs. Robert Lacin, of Raleigh, donated the intricately wrought case containing a handwritten scroll of the Book of Esther.

“The long-term goal of the Museum’s Judaic art collection is to celebrate the spiritual life and rituals of the Jewish people throughout Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, and Asia,” said John Coffey, deputy director for art. “The acquisition of this Megillah is especially welcome as it is the first Judaic object from the once-thriving Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire.”

Dr. Lacin, a native of Izmir (Smyrna), Turkey, felt a special connection to the work of art. “Our family in Izmir once owned such a personal Megillah, though several generations ago,” he said.

“The Museum is one of the first public art museums to have an entire gallery devoted to Judaic art, and I thought it very important to build on this work, while also showcasing the rich diversity of Jewish art. Jews lived all across the globe and the art made in various places reflects that. This filigreed Megillah is typical of work done in Izmir and different from those done in Europe, even at the same time,” said Dr. Lacin.

The Book of Esther tells of the rescue of Jews of ancient Persia from the murderous plot of the king’s adviser, Haman. The story is the basis for Purim, the Jewish celebration of deliverance from evil. Esther, the Jewish queen of Persia, and her uncle Mordecai, are celebrated as the heroes who saved their people from destruction.

As part of the Purim observance, the Megillah is read in the synagogue or home. Typical of Esther Scrolls among the Ladino (or Sephardic) Jews of the Ottoman Empire, this Megillah is protected by an ornamental case of silver-gilt filigree, tapering in four coronets and topped by a coral bead. The sophisticated style and high degree of workmanship suggests its origin in the Turkish port city of Izmir (Smyrna), home to a thriving Jewish community beginning in the 16th century. Among the Jews of Izmir it was customary for the father of a bride to present a fine Megillah to his future son-in-law.

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Of Iberian origin, the Sephardic Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal in the late 15th century. Many refugees found sanctuary in the Islamic lands where they were welcomed by the Ottoman sultans. Islamic design strongly influenced the style of ritual art among the Ottoman Jews, as seen in the intricate floral patterning of this Megillah case.

About the Judaic Art Collection

The North Carolina Museum of Art is one of only two art museums in the nation with a permanent display of Jewish ceremonial art. The Judaic Art Gallery was founded by Dr. Abram Kanof and opened in 1983. The Museum continues to acquire new works of Judaica with the generous support of the Friends of the Judaic Art Gallery. Visitors may tour the gallery during Museum hours or arrange for a guided tour with one of the Museum's trained docents. Guided tours must be scheduled at least three weeks in advance by calling (919) 664-6748.

For more information on the North Carolina Museum of Art or the Judaic Art Gallery, visit www.ncartmuseum.org or call (919) 839-NCMA (6262).

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Photo credit: Ottoman Empire (Turkey), probably Izmir, *Esther Scroll (Megillah) and Case*, 19th Century, Case: silver-gilt filigree, semi-precious stone; scroll: pen and ink on vellum, six sheets; H: 17 1/16 in., North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Lacin, 2007

Note to the Editor: Article by Harriette Weinstein.

The North Carolina Museum of Art's permanent collection spans more than 5,000 years, from ancient Egypt to the present, making the institution one of the premier visual arts museums in the Southeast. The Museum uses its collection to provide educational, aesthetic, intellectual and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The Museum offers a series of changing national touring exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films and concerts.

The North Carolina Museum of Art, Lawrence J. Wheeler, director, is located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, Michael F. Easley, governor, and an agency of the Department of Cultural Resources, Lisbeth C. Evans, secretary. Museum hours are Tuesday–Thursday and Saturday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m.–9 p.m.; and Sunday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Closed Monday. Admission is free. For information call (919) 839-NCMA (6262) or visit the NCMA's Web site at www.ncartmuseum.org.