

Rudolf Hallo and Hessian Judaica

By Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek

Rudolf Hallo (1898–1933 (for a photo s.: <https://digipres.cjh.org>) was the son of the decoration painter Wilhelm Hallo (1858–1928) and his wife Henriette, née Plaut (1870–1928). After graduating from high school and participating in World War I, he studied classical archaeology and art history at the University of Göttingen, where he received his doctorate in 1923. His dissertation was on *Die Monumentalaltaere des Altertums*, on *monumental altars of antiquity*. He had been interested in art early on.

In 1922 he went to teach at the *Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus*, the Free Jewish Teaching House in Frankfurt am Main, which was founded and run by philosopher Franz Rosenzweig (who became very famous with his theological-philosophical treaty *Star of Redemption*), a close friend of the family from Kassel. The *Freie Jüdisches Lehrhaus* was a liberal Jewish institution for adult education. It goes back to the Jewish Adult Education Center in Frankfurt am Main, which was founded in 1920.

In 1922, 1100 students were counted here. That was about four percent of the entire community, which at that time had about thirty thousand members. This made *the Freie Jüdisches Lehrhaus* one of the most heavily frequented adult education centers of the time and probably the most important institution of Jewish adult education in general. In addition, it was a place for programmatic discussions between the various political currents of European Jewry. In 1938, the Free Jewish Teaching House was closed by the Nazi regime.

Back in Kassel in 1925 Rudolf Hallo became a scientific assistant at the State Museum there. Here he worked first for the Count's Chamber of Art, and from 1931 for the Museum of Prints and Drawings and the Art Library. In 1923 he published a big article on *Bronze casts of ancient statues*, in 1929 *The observatories of Kassel in Hessian times*. And in 1931 together with Kurt Luthmer *The Museum of Prints and Drawings and the Library of the State Art collections in Kassel*. In 1930 he wrote the history of „*The Hallo Family. 350 years from the life of a German court Jew and craftsman family*“. He proved to be a gifted researcher. As such he was able to trace his ancestors to one Israel Aron Hammerschlag who lived in Prague around 1600. Hammerschlag means the man who wields the hammer, indicating that he was a metalworker, maybe a goldsmith. On his tombstone he is called „Rosch haKahal“. In 1614 his wife died in the Plague epidemic and – already an old man – he left for the Holy Land. He died on his way in Venice and was buried in the old Jewish cemetery on the Lido. His grandson and namesake was made a Court Jew in 1657 by Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg and settled in Berlin. In the course of the first half oft he 18th century the Hallo family, which adopted their last name from a short stay in Halle/Saale, moved to Kassel.

In particular Rudolf Hallo, also worked for the Jewish Museum, which opened in 1927 as part of the State Museum. In honoring his father's 100 birthday in 1996 William W. Hallo stated: „He was most recently in charge of the Kupferstichkabinett of the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Kassel, and his excellent and detailed descriptions of this and other collections of so-called smaller works of art in gold and iron, of clocks and stromonic instruments, of drawings and sculptures remain of extraordinary value to this day, especially since many of the originals did not survive the war. The same combination of scholarly and conventional interests also explains another leitmotif of his life's

work, namely Jewish history and especially Jewish art. One can indeed claim that the scholarly appreciation of art objects of Jewish worship and the Jewish household began with him.“ (William W. Hallo, *Die Aufgabe des freien jüdischen Lehrhauses. Ein neuer Blick in den Auftrag Franz Rosenzweigs an Rudolf Hallo*, in: Evelyn Adunka/Albert Brandstätter, *Das jüdische Lehrhaus als Modell lebensbegleitenden Lernens*, Wien 1999, pp. 71–85). Although this assessment does not correspond to reality, it must be said that Rudolf Hallo was indeed an outstanding scientist and contributed significantly to the founding of Jewish art history as a discipline.

In 1928 Rudolf Hallo published *Jewish Folk Art in Hesse. Jubilee volume of the Sinai Loge in Kassel (Jüdische Volkskunst in Hessen. Festschrift der Sinai-Loge zu Kassel)*. Committed to the spirit of the time, he asked in an introduction the question, also asked by contemporaries, whether there was one Jewish folk art at all. And he answered the question enthusiastically in the affirmative: „The question of whether there is a Jewish folk art, that is, whether Jews are willing and able to express this desire wherever and whenever they are interested in the beauty, forcefulness and individuality of specific household goods or cult objects, this question can only be answered in the affirmative. There is Jewish folk art [...]“ (p. 9).

In the publication he presented a *Parochet* from Reichensachsen from 1750 (pl. IV), a *Kapporet* from Schmalkalden, dating 1729 and a circumcisionbank from 1734 stemming from Beverungen (pl. VI). One wonders if one would have known about the existence of Judaica objects from those small towns from Hesse or former Hesse, if he had not given his attention to them.

The slim booklet *Jewish Cult and Art Monuments at the Hessisches Landesmuseum Kassel. Presented as a picture of the history of the Jews in Hesse at the instigation and with the support of the Jewish Community of Kassel and with the assistance of the Jewish Museum Association Kassel (Jüdische Kult- und Kunst-Denkmäler im Hessischen Landesmuseum zu Kassel. Als ein Bild der Geschichte der Juden in Hessen dargestellt auf Veranlassung und mit Unterstützung der Israelitischen Gemeinde Kassel und mit Beihilfe des jüdischen Museumsvereins Kassel)*, published in Kassel in 1928, had a lasting influence on the interpretation of Jewish cult objects. Starting with a rare color photo of a *Parochet* in Kassel's Synagogue from 1744, he embedded the Judaica objects presented in the history of the Jews in Hesse. In a well thought-out manner he assigns the objects their place in history and makes them „speak“ vividly. E.g. he writes about a *Tafelaufsatz*, a centerpiece (pl. II, middle) (fig.1):

„The 52 cm high centrepiece belongs to the old landgrave's silver treasure, in which it was placed on April 25, 1780 as a gift from the court Jew Seidel David to Friedrich II. Such gifts from individual Jews were not unusual; in the same year, Seidel himself presented a green glass with the coats of arms of the imperial estates, and the supplier widow Herztin presented 1749 medals. And already in 1656, the painter Engelhaft Scheffler honored the landgrave with a painted little suitcase and Simon the Jew with two crystal candlesticks as a New Year's gift. Of all such items - apart from a silver-mounted rock-crystal bottle, which Wilhelm IV purchased in 1588 from Gottschalk Jude Ecksteines from Witzenhausen - only this magnificent ship remains. The nave with its stone magnificent galleon painting and its colorful armed crew is stamped by Johann Adolf Kieslein in Ulm, who died in 1691. The foot with the stag and the shield held by him must have been placed under it later; the hallmark is unknown. What moved the agent de la cour to make this gift was probably precisely the connection, transparent in its symbolism, between the richly laden Levantine driver and the slogan he found on the inside of the allegorical coat of arms shield of the apprenticeship, military and nutritional status, at the same time as the date 1754:

Vivat, who honors the action,
and the one who owns the ship,
he has the full charge,
so the ship was brought here,
with the happy Vivat caller
belonging to him all alone!“ (p. 14).



Fig. 1: Centrepiece in the shape of a showpiece ship, in: Rudolf Hallo, Jüdische Kult- und Kunstdenkmäler im Hessischen Landesmuseum zu Kassel, Kassel 1928, plate II, middle.

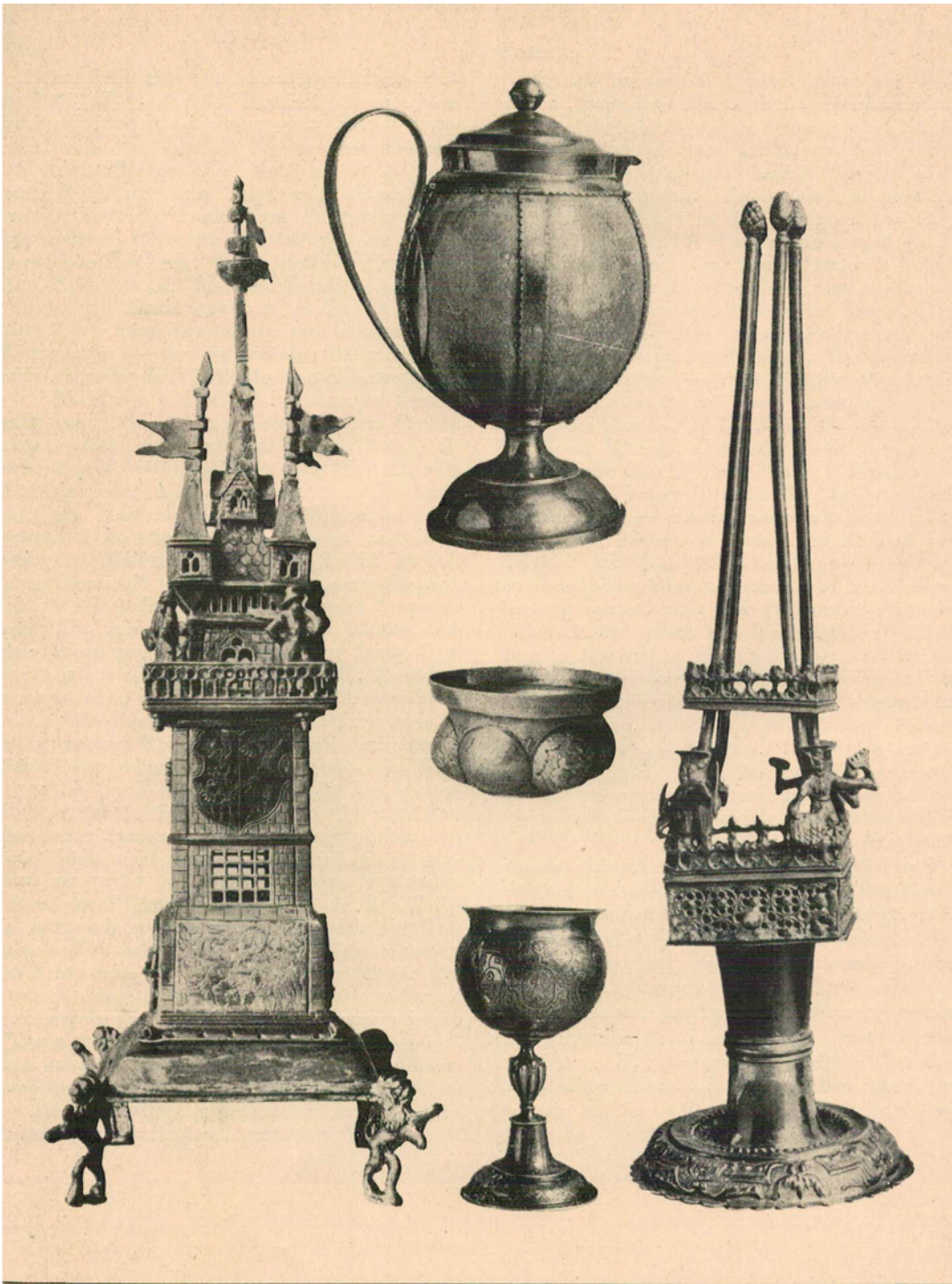


Fig. 2: Bsamim container in the form of a watchtower, in: Rudolf Hallo, Jüdische Kult- und Kunstdenkmäler im Hessischen Landesmuseum zu Kassel, Kassel 1928, plate III, left.

One of his most famous characterizations of a judaica object is the following of a German („Balsam- oder Psombüchse“) Bsamim Tower (pl. III, left) (fig. 2). It shaped and influences the identification of towers as Jewish spice towers until today: „Balsam or besamim box in the shape of a watchtower, silver, the coats of arms, dials, flags and profiles gilded. From the old, landgrave silver treasure. The coats of arms of Georg I von Herneberg-Schleusingen and Johanna von Nassau point to the only marriage of 1463 between these two counts, but our device is more than a century younger, as the German and Latin day and night clocks and the engraved putti prove, not to mention the cast arquebusiers added later. The smoking tower is revealed by oven doors and lattice windows. In addition, an exact counterpart of purer Gothic ornamentation with window roses

instead of clocks, but without soldiers and supporting lions, can be found in the synagogue of Friedberg. It is possible that both were created in the Wetterau and that ours was a gift from the Schmalkaldic Jews to their count's house, from which it was then inherited by their legal successors, the Hessian landgraves.“ (p. 16). The threedimensional figurines are said to be later additions but are strangely enough not questioned at all (s. below in the context of the „Hawdlohgerät“).

In other cases he formulated clearly that Judaica objects were not always made as such but became so by a secondary Jewish usage. Thus he writes about a beaker and a jug used in the Jewish community (pl. III, middle) (fig. 2):

„Havdalah-beaker and Wine jug. The exquisite baluster foot mug, silver gilded, is a work from the end of the 16th century in the scroll work and auricular work style of the Nuremberg masters Echter and Flint. It shows imperial eagles, Turkish and children's heads in the cartouches. One of the many cases in which precious, profane pieces have become Jewish cult objects through consecration and pious use alone. The wine jug consists of firegilt silver the body is formed by an ostrich egg. This is after medieval style, which loved to bring rarities of nature in dainty silver settings to delightfully enhanced vividness. Here the matte drawing of the base and lid and the raised handle make one wonder. Closer examination reveals that the hinge bands do not span an egg at all, but an egg-colored enameled sheet metal vessel. However, since an honourable Kassel master of the jug has stamped inspection and master marks (from 1820), one may well assume that he wanted to replace a real ostrich egg jug from the old municipal property with this fake egg container.“ (p. 16)

It turns out, that the latter piece was a gift of Simon Hallo to the Kassel synagogue. It was the same Simon Hallo who started the family tradition of painting, gilding, and synagogue decoration in 1816, when Simon became an apprentice housepainter, the medieval painters' guild having opened to Jews in the wake of the Emancipation. However Simon Hallo already had predecessors as donor for the Kassel synagogue. A Torah mantle was donated by David Hallo to the synagogue as early as in 1756 (https://digipres.cjh.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE9426677).

A daughter of said David Hallo, Brendel, married Joseph Rinald. Joseph Rinald (1744–1811) came from a respected Jewish merchant family in Kassel. He owned one of the first silk stores in the residence city, whose customers are said to have included the landgrave's court and the nobility (Kasseler Post, January 6, 1926). He was portrayed by Wilhelm Böttner in 1800. The portrait is held in the collection of the Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel (inv. no. GK 840 (1875/1208); <https://altmeister.museum-kassel.de/28327/>). The sitter's son, Wolf Rinald, painted two portraits of his parents, which Ludwig Emil Grimm engraved in 1814 as etchings. The photo of an etching of Brendel in her old days can be found in the Hallo family photograph album, 1752–1954 in the Center for Jewish History in New York (https://digipres.cjh.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE9426677).

Ludwig Emil Grimm (1790–1863) was the younger brother of famous fairy tale collectors and linguists Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, who distinguished himself as a painter, but above all as a draughtsman, caricaturist and etcher. With his work he made a Hessian contribution to the art of German Romanticism. His artistic talent was already evident in his early years, when he drew plants, animals and landscapes after nature without special instruction, which helped him to receive his first training at the Kassel Art Academy from 1805. When he etched Brendel he was 14 years young. It's rather telling that the wider Hallo family had been fully intertwined with the cultivated, scientific and artistic bourgeoisie in Kassel generations before Rudolf was born.



Fig. 3: *Havdalah compendium*, in: Rudolf Hallo, *Jüdische Kult- und Kunstdenkmäler im Hessischen Landesmuseum zu Kassel, Kassel 1928, plate III.*

Let's come back to the *Jüdische Kult- und Kunstdenkmäler*. On plate III there is another famous object, The Havdalah compendium produced by Jeremias Zobel in Frankfurt in 1731 (fig. 3). Hallo writes that the piece stems from the Rothfels collection. The Rothfels was another bourgeois family in Cassel – however they were more on the nationalistic side. He described the piece („Hawdlohgerät“): „Four-part spice tray above the shaft. Above it, four elastic rods, which allow the candle to be clamped by means of a sliding clamping plate. The corner figures are the lower community officials: the butcher, the mazzes baker, the shul-knocker and the servant/beadle with their equipment. What is interesting about this piece, which was probably made to order, is its stylistic polyphony, which is not uncommon on Jewish art monuments in Germany: modern French band work, clear Renaissance arrangement of the opening rosettes on the box walls, Gothic internal wreaths over the frame.“ (p.16). In the meantime one of the miniature bearded and hatted figurines standing at the top four corners of the spice compartment was identified as a Torah scribe. What amazes is the fact that Hallo gives a perfect description but does not ask about the meaning of the figurines. Why on earth were they – especially as „minor or lower community officials “ added? And, more generally, why is the decoration of a cult object with three-dimensional figures not questioned at all? After all, the object in question dates from the first third of the 18th century, a period in which the use of three-dimensional figures on Judaica objects, that means in a liturgical context, can by no means be considered "normal". After all, it will take

until the beginning of the 19th century for Orthodoxy to officially permit the use of figures of Moses and Aaron on cult objects, subject to conditions (see the article by Sabine Bergler and Daniela Schmid). So there are still a number of unresolved questions.

It is unknown how the piece ended up in the United States where it was acquired by Harry G. Friedman and donated to the Jewish Museum, New York with the acquisition no. F 3661.

One more object from the catalogue shall be mentioned (pl. VII) (fig. 4): „The earthen, deep brown glazed Hanukkah lamp comes from Marburg. Its yellow decoration consists of two stars, which stand right and left next to a frond, a disappearing shadow image of ancient mythical trees of life. Ornamentation and coloring preserve the general character, but the purpose is a purely Jewish

one ...“ (p.24). In a formal way the piece looks familiar. It resembles all the Hanukkah-lamps and the Hanukkah Eisen from tin with the two stars on each side in the Alsacian region.



Fig. 4: Earthen, deep brown glazed Hanukkah lamp, in: Rudolf Hallo, *Jüdische Kult- und Kunstdenkmäler im Hessischen Landesmuseum zu Kassel*, Kassel 1928, plate VII.

Insights, also photographic ones, into the first exhibition of Hallo's Jewish Museum gives art historian Ekkehard Schmidberger (*Rudolf Hallo und das jüdische Museum in Kassel*. In: *Juden in Kassel 1808–1933*. Kassel 1986, S. 59–67.

<https://bgakasselblog.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/rudolf-hallo-und-das-jc3bdische-museum-in-kassel.pdf>). The presentation was supported and shaped by lawyer Julius Dalberg who himself had built up a Judaica collection which formed the foundation of the museum. He was responsible for education and welfare in the Kassel Jewish community and he was the editor of the regional Jewish weekly. From the very beginning he played an active role in the working group of the museum and served as secretary of the Jewish Museum Association. The museum opened April 10 1927 in the *Hessisches Landesmuseum*, in the Hessen State Museum.

As a cultural historian, Hallo was interested in always highlighting the common features of cultural heritage in the exhibitions. In his „Jewish Folk Art“ he wrote: „Solomon's temple has vanished, like that of Herod, and for those who want to build today, remember that the Jews had the longest of their history in the Occident!“ (p. 59). Thus, Jewish culture should be understood

according to Hallo as an integral part of occidental culture, the specific regional Jewish culture as part of specific Hessen culture. And as far as Jewish folk art was concerned, "where could there be more of it than in that land where for centuries and generations Jews have been sitting in small fixed groups and family vestiges, where they have grown together with the land and where the land has grown together with them, in Hessen?" (p. 9).

In this way Hallo was ideologically far away from the Frankfurt Museum of Jewish Antiquities. He was a representative of those who built on integrative museum concepts and less on particularistic ones. He understood Jewish history as part of Hesse's history, and Hesse as part of Jewish history. Beyond this, his aim for the museum was also to serve as a central office for Hesse's Jewry including an archive and a scientific library.

In January 1933 Rudolf Hallo gave a lecture at the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* in Hamburg, fell ill with pneumonia and died only a few days later in Hamburg in the house of Bruno Snell. He was buried at the Jewish Cemetery Kassel-Bettenhausen.

On September 17, 1922, he had married the economist Gertrud Hallo, née Rubensohn, with whom he had two children, including the later wellknown Old Orientalist William W. Hallo (1928–2015) who was quoted earlier. In 1939, the family managed to emigrate to England, and in 1940 they were able to obtain visa to the USA.