

טבע

יגל
פדקו

שקו
צילת

בעשכ
מלו

תמצ
מור
שור

לדעת בארץ רבך בכר
אלהים יחננו וברכנו י
גויים
עמם יחננו וברכנו י

הנססת

ומלקתיה



ישמחו וירגו לאמרי כי השפט עבדים מישואה ור לאמרי הגלגל עזר זכור

למנ
צחב
נב
זוהו עמם אצו יום יודו עמם
או צננה יו הלה יברכו או רזים
אצו יום יודו עמם

אזוסת



ומחתתה זש

יתע
קרע
שטר
ננד
לכש
נטר
צתנ
ש





Jacobe al pericolo di Labano

Il sogno di Jacobe



*L'angelo a Jacobe
SICCOBO FANNO*

*Labano giunge Jacobe a monte
FECIT 1963 ROMA*

Windows on Jewish Worlds

Edited by

Shalom Sabar, Emile Schrijver, Falk Wiesemann
in cooperation with Lies Meiboom, Sam Herman

Essays in Honor of William Gross

Collector of Judaica

on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday



WalburgPers



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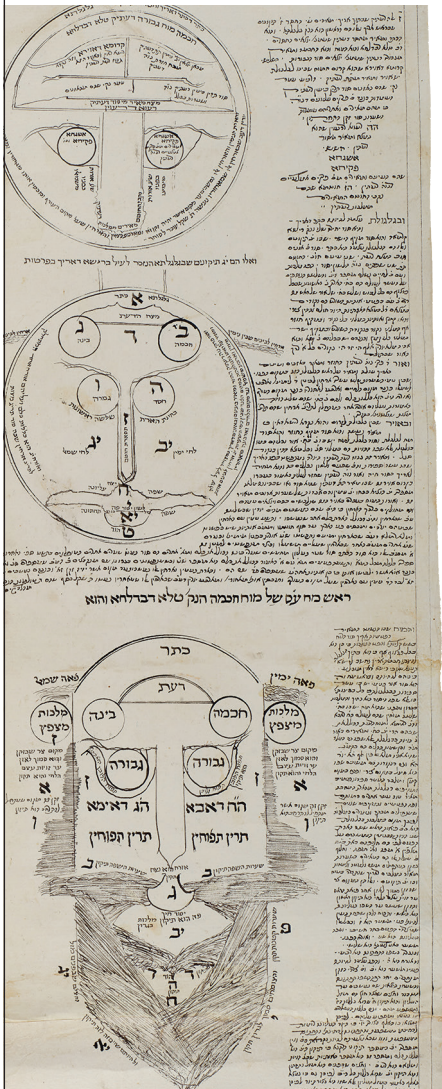
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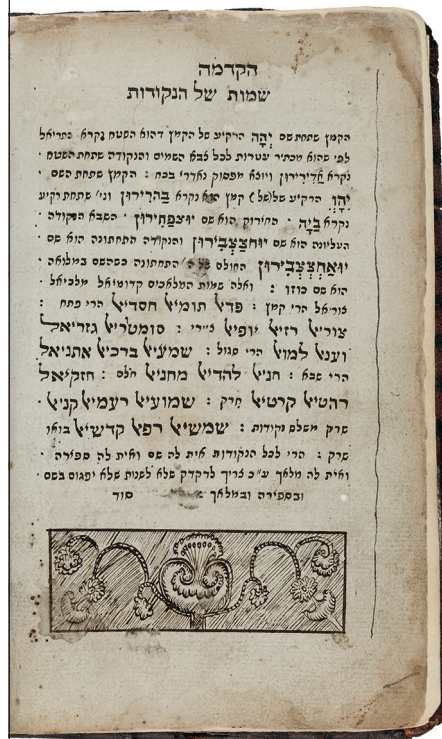
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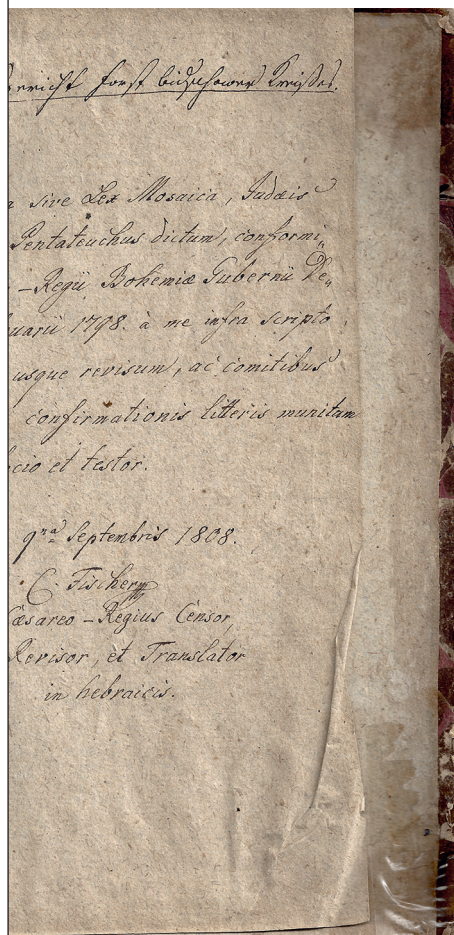
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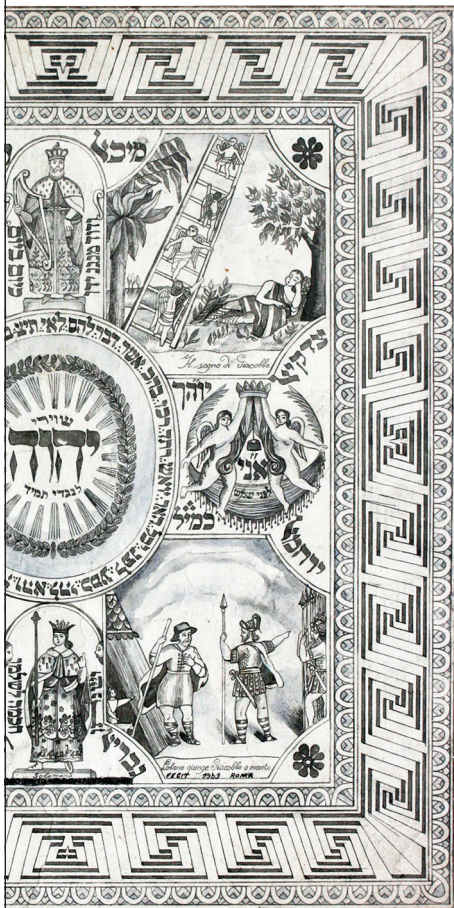
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Introduction

The Life and Life's Work of William Gross, Collector of Judaica

William Gross
photograph by
Rani Moscovitz

To be in the home of William Gross is to be at the epicenter of the Judaica world. The phone rings at 10:00 am. It is a Judaica dealer requesting to meet with William to discuss an object that the dealer has just acquired. "With pleasure! Let me check my schedule for this afternoon..." William replies enthusiastically. At 11:30 the doorbell rings... a shipment of objects from the Gross Family Collection has just returned from an exhibition abroad. "Wonderful!" William exclaims to the delivery crew. He offers them cool drinks before they begin to unpack. The phone is ringing as the door closes behind them... a scholar-friend from America is coming to Israel in a few months. Would it be possible to stay at William and Lisa's for a couple of nights? "Absolutely! I'll check with Lisa, but I'm sure it's fine." It always is. 12:30 pm sees the arrival of two local academics, eager to examine the material William has set aside for them. "*Brukhim ha-ba'im!*" William cries out affectionately. Ah, and here's the dealer (and his friend) who called this morning. A little earlier than expected, but no matter, William can juggle both sets of visitors... and the incoming call... about an interesting piece

of Judaica coming up for auction next week.

"What a crazy day!" William effuses, a huge smile spreading across his face, "I am the luckiest man I know."

William Leigh Gross was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 15 October 1939. He attended Harvard University, majoring in history and graduating magna cum laude. As he is so fond of telling, his passion for collecting Judaica was sparked by his late father-in-law, Judaica collector Maurice Spertus, founder of the Spertus Museum, Chicago. William began collecting in 1964 with the purchase of a single spice tower. In 1969, after a few years in business and Jewish public life in America, he made *Aliyah* with his greatest supporter, his wife Lisa, and their three children, Daniella, Aaron and Noah. His collecting efforts continued and expanded exponentially in Israel, fueled by a passion that borders on obsession. "Collectors, and especially passionate collectors, are by nature obsessive," he readily admits. "I certainly would include myself in that definition, and I assure you that if you do not believe me you have

Shmire Hasidic *Epl-Becher*
(Apple-Shaped Kiddush
Cup), Ukraine, late 19th
century, silver, chased and
incised, cast, 20 × 9.5 cm.
GFCTrust 017.001.071



only to ask my family!" Indeed, William's passion for collecting Judaica developed into his life's work.

Although several thousand objects have been added to Gross Family Collection since that first spice tower, William's activities as a collector extend far beyond the acquisition of objects. He is an acquirer of knowledge. A recorder of information. A cataloger of the highest order. His personal Judaica database, which he has built up over the past 25 years, is an unparalleled repository of information about Judaica objects, Jewish iconography, and Judaica reference literature (his own reference library numbers some 15,000 volumes). No other collector possesses a stronger drive, or greater enthusiasm, to personally understand each and every object that comes into his collection. And, as attested by the more than thirty-five articles and essays he has published thus far in books, exhibition catalogues and journals, William's thirst for knowledge, and dedication to uncovering the significance and meaning of his collection, is never-ending.

Over the course of the last fifty years, William has developed what he calls a "Window Theory of Judaica." By this he means that each of his objects serves as a window through which one may view Jewish ritual and life in a distinct place and time. Viewed from different angles, every object reflects – and is in fact a product of – the social/political/economic/intellectual environment in which its owner lived, and in which it was used and venerated. And while many of his objects are of fine artistic quality, and are distinguished for their monetary and artistic value, their ultimate worth, as he sees it, is in their role as historical documents. Peering through these Judaica "windows," William explains with his infectious enthusiasm, "is as exciting as reading the best current novel or watching the latest fine movie or play or attending a concert of Beethoven's Ninth. It is a constant, never-ending, ever-changing intellectual and emotional stimulation of the highest degree."

What truly sets William Gross apart as a collector, however, is his unwavering dedication to sharing his collection, discoveries and resources with all who are interested. William truly views the Gross Family Collection not as a "private" collection, but rather as a "public collection in private hands." He believes that every object in his possession is the rightful property of the Jewish people. His role, as their temporary custodian, is to

preserve them in a safe environment, discover about them all he can, and make them available to others as widely and as often as possible. He fills this role impeccably.

At any given moment there are dozens, sometimes hundreds, of items from William's collection on display somewhere in the world. Since the 1980s, The Gross Family Collection has been represented in more than 170 public exhibitions in both Jewish and general museums worldwide. In an age that sees museums constantly challenged to secure high quality loans for blockbuster exhibitions, William's generosity is a dream come true. He will never disappoint. He is not only delighted to lend objects, but also to supply full descriptions of every piece and professional images of the finest quality. And what is true for public display is equally true for private ritual. Numerous friends and congregations have approached William to use items from his collection during their synagogue celebrations. Seeing these objects returned to their original use, restored "to life," gives William the greatest of pleasures. As he often says, Judaica objects "were not created to sit on a shelf."

William's generosity in lending objects to museums and synagogues is surpassed only by his generosity in granting scholars complete access to his entire collection. He is the "chieftain" of what we would like to call the "Sharing Collectors." As every author in this volume (as well as many of its readers) can attest, there is no other collector in the world like William Gross, so willing to share his objects, his passion, his database, his library, his house, his time, his energy, his vast network of connections, and above all, his unconditional love of the Judaica world, with anyone and everyone. He shares indiscriminately, with young and old, students and professors, peers and laymen, without fear or favor. He has been, and still is, a mentor to so many of us, including the editors of this volume. Our research in the field, our public lectures, and even our university classes would not have reached the same level without William Gross.

It is thus with the deepest feelings of friendship and appreciation that we present a collection of original essays on objects from the Gross Family Collection, prepared in honor of William's eightieth birthday. These writings are the product not only of individual scholarship, but of collective gratitude, authored by friends and colleagues from around the world who have shared William's

passion for Judaica, have benefitted time and again from his generosity and knowledge, and have experienced the warm hospitality that he and Lisa provide in their ever-bustling home in Ramat Aviv. We celebrate the life and life's work of arguably the most eminent of all contemporary Judaica collectors... a collector whose answer to nearly every request is a resounding "Absolutely!" "With pleasure!"

With best wishes for many more years filled with happiness, peace and good health.

Shalom Sabar, Jerusalem
Emile Schrijver, Amsterdam
Falk Wiesemann, Düsseldorf

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