

# HERBERT & EILEEN BERNARD MUSEUM OF JUDAICA

## SECTION I: WELCOME TO Semi[te] Sweet: On Jews and Chocolate

Chocolate is a Jewish immigrant food. The chocolate trade parallels the migrations of Jewish refugees, beginning with Sephardim of Iberian heritage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Spanish and Portuguese Jews sought refuge from the broad-reaching perils of the Inquisition, some packed with them new chocolate tastes, techniques and opportunities, thereby supplying and extending chocolate to larger markets. Strong kinship and mercantile ties connected these wanderers along shipping lanes as some became active in the cocoa bean trade and acquired knowledge of chocolate making.

Indeed, Jews jumped onto the chocolate trail in the early phases of European interaction with the New World drink in diasporic places such as New Spain (now Mexico, Central America, the southwest and central US and Spanish Florida); Oxford, England; Martinique; Amsterdam; Bayonne, France; Brabant, Belgium; New York City and Newport, Rhode Island. These included chocolate entrepreneurs who fostered, perpetuated and fed an appetite for the drinking chocolate of the day. In New York City, Jewish trade in chocolate may be traced back to 1701.

Later, twentieth-century Jewish emigrants transferred their businesses of eating chocolate to new locations. Eliyahu Fromenchenko of Elite Chocolate moved to Israel from Latvia, where he had co-owned Laima Chocolate. Stephen Klein relocated from Vienna to New York, where he established the iconic chocolate company Barton's Bonbonniere.

Delight your mind and your taste buds as you partake in this expedition into the mysteries, opportunities, and resilience of Jewish history.

The exhibition is based on the bestselling book *On the Chocolate Trail: A Delicious Adventure Connecting Jews, Religions, History, Travel, Rituals and Recipes to the Magic of Cacao* (Second Edition, Jewish Lights, 2017) by Rabbi Deborah R. Prinz. Also, some of this material appeared in “Chocolate Migrates to North America with Sephardi Jews,” by Deborah Prinz in *Tastes of Faith: Jewish Eating in the United States* edited by Leah Hochman (Purdue University, 2017). ...

## **SECTION II: SEPHARDI DIASPORA: COLONIAL PERIOD NORTH AMERICA**

### **Jews Dip into Chocolate in the British Colonies**

American Jewish historian Jacob Rader Marcus was correct in calling chocolate a “Sephardic Jewish specialty.” Sephardim immigrated to New Spain (Mexico, Central America, the southwest and central US and Spanish Florida) and added to its chocolate culture. In the British Colonies, the chocolate work of Sephardim contributed to the growth and sustenance of the nascent Jewish American community. These seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jewish merchants dipped deeply into the chocolate concerns of their day. Out of necessity, Sephardi Jews sought refuge in distant locales after leaving Spain and Portugal yet stayed in touch through trade; chocolate played a crucial role in deepening those ties to their homeland and providing opportunities for success in the Colonies.

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### **SECTION V: ISRAELIS: *MESHUGA* FOR CHOCOLATE**

Chocolate has transitioned from generation to generation into the Israeli palate and psyche. Israeli chocolate experiences and confections include liqueur, chocolate spread and cakes, or it is devoured alone. Chocolate’s *aliyah* to Israel accompanied new immigrants such as Elite’s founders. Paralleling the growth of the state, chocolate has a heritage of determination and adaptability. Elite’s pioneering *para* (cow) brand, originally known as *Shamnonit* (fat), is wrapped in distinctive red paper imprinted with a cow. Israelis fondly identify it as *Para* or *Para Adumah* (red cow), or *Shokolada Para* (chocolate cow). This distinctive image celebrates early Israeli farming and dairy

production. ...

#### **SECTION VI: DECEMBER CHOCOLATES MELT INTO GELT**

Gold-covered chocolate coins for the Christmas season commemorating the miracles of St. Nicholas may be the basis for the gold foil-covered chocolate *gelt* celebrating the amazing events of Hanukkah. Or, the other way around. These Christian and Jewish golden coin stories originate from the Mediterranean area, are centuries old, recount sagas of courage, and generate a love of chocolate. Jewish and Christian customs melt together in December on this fork of the chocolate trail. ...

#### **SECTION VII: WHAT IS THE BEST CHOCOLATE?**

Our chocolate cravings could be satisfied simply by the closest available morsel. Chocolate might be rated by percentage of cacao ingredient, the type of add-ins, its country of origin, the maker's brand and so much more. Or, we could consider that the best chocolate derives from companies that develop fair business practices and from informed consumer purchases that satisfy our human and religious values. That might be a company that adheres to principles of fair labor, and is both environmentally responsible and nutritionally sound. ...