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MANUSCRIPTS (by location)

The Rothschild Miscellany.

[Jerusalem, Israel Musuem, Ms. 180/51]

[0-948223-030] London, 1989. 16 x 21 cm, 948 pp + commentary.

The Rothschild Miscellany was commissioned by Moses ben Yekuthiel Hacoen probably around 1470. It was a time when the Jews in Italy came into contact with all sectors of society and adopted the way of life of the gentile aristocracy. They enjoyed the favorable attitude of some of the great Italian Princes such as the Medici of Florence and the Este of Ferrara. The prohibition for Christians to lend money for interest was highly beneficial to the Jewish community, many of whom prospered. The wealthy Jew became a man of the Renaissance with a taste for letters and art, and pleasure in affluent living. At the same time the Jews never became estranged from their Jewish intellectual and religious heritage and this was a period of unprecedented cultural activity amongst Italian Jewry, producing scholars, artists, poets and physicians. The Rothschild Miscellany, as it is now known, consisting of more than 37 religious and secular works, is the most elegantly and lavishly executed Hebrew MS of that era. Among the religious books are Psalms, Proverbs and Job, and a yearly prayer book including the Passover Haggadah. All have illustrations for each festival and prayers for special occasions. The secular books include philosophical, moralistic and scientific treatises. The text throughout the MS is accompanied by marginal notes and commentaries of the sages. From its inception it was planned as a sumptuous work to encompass, in minute detail, almost every custom of religious and secular Jewish life. The figure drawings and border decorations of the miniatures mirror the rich Italian Renaissance influence and were probably made in a workshop in the Ferrara region. Of 948 pages, 816 are decorated in minute detail in vibrant colours, gold and silver. Fanciful landscapes, spatial perspective settings and the precision of human and animal representations echo the style of the best artists who worked for the d'Este court in the third quarter of the 15th c, possibly connected with the workshop of the artists who illuminated the famous Latin Bible of Borso d'Este. No other Hebrew manuscript equals the richness and scope of the illumination of this Miscellany. Limited edition of 550 copies, bound in full leather.
\$ 9935



1479

The Rothschild Haggadah. A Passover Compendium from the Rothschild Miscellany.

[Jerusalem, Israel Museum]

[0-948223-189] London, 2000. 16 x 21 cm, 2 vols, 44, 79 pp.

Commissioned by Moses ben Yekutiel Hacoheh and written and decorated in northern Italy in 1479, this Haggadah is unrivalled in richness and scope. Although medieval haggadahs are among the most extensively decorated of all types of Hebrew MSS, the Rothschild Haggadah, stands out for its elegant and elaborate illustrations of the Passover story and the richness of its marginal texts. The MS comprises the Ashkenazi Passover eve service as we know it today (except for Grace after Meals which was deliberately omitted by the scribe), provided as the main text in the center of the page. In the margins is Maimonides' *Hilkhot Hamez Umatsah* ("Laws Concerning Leavened and Unleavened Bread"), a classical survey of Passover and its ceremonies. In addition the book includes the section devoted to the *piyyutim*—the liturgical poems and songs—for all four evenings of the festival of Passover, also exquisitely illuminated; in its margin one finds a medieval text on weights and measures. Commentary and translations by Raphael Loewe, Jeremy Schonfield & Iris Fishof. Limited edition of 550 copies, bound in full vellum, with slipcase.
\$ 850



c.1280

The North French Hebrew Miscellany.

[London, British Library, Add. 11639]

[0-948223-219] London, 2005. 12.5 x 16 cm, 1494 pp + commentary.

MS Add. 11639, written and illustrated in northern France around 1280 (possibly in the environs of Troyes), is of profound importance in the history and culture of the Jewish people. Its contents are rich and varied, with altogether 84 different groups of texts, including hundreds of poems. These include the Pentateuch and Haftarah (readings from the Prophets), Song of Songs and several other biblical texts; the daily, Sabbath and festival prayers, including those for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; Grace after Meals; *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers); assorted legal codes and formulae for agreements concerning marriage, divorce and business partnerships; an arithmetical riddle; laws governing Tefilin, Ritual Slaughter and an abundance of other texts including the *Mezuzah*; the Hebrew version of the Book of Tobit (the earliest extant copy known), a wide range of medieval poetry and Isaac de Corbeil's *Sefer Mitsvot Katan* (also the earliest known copy, composed 1277). The codex is a masterpiece of its time and place, bearing witness to the artistic quality achieved in northern France at this period. Benjamin the Scribe collaborated with artists whose skills are comparable with those makers of the finest contemporary Gothic manuscripts. The numerous full-page miniatures illustrate famous scenes from the Bible, and marginal decorations, with their constantly varying arabesques, grotesques, flowers, animals, birds and fishes, adorn virtually every folio. Commentary by Jeremy Schonfield with contributions by Diana Rowland-Smith, & Raphael Loewe. Limited edition of 500 copies, bound in full leather.
\$ 8995



14th c.

The Barcelona Haggadah.

[London, British Library, Add. 14761]
[0-948223-081] London, 1992. 19 x 26 cm, 322 pp + commentary.

The Barcelona Haggadah, created around 1350 and named after the heraldic shield it bears resembling the arms of Barcelona, is recognized as one of the finest illuminated Hebrew MSS in the British Library. When it was created the Jews of Aragon and Catalonia formed one of the largest communities in Europe, and Barcelona was home to a flourishing center of book illumination linked to the Court and influenced by Italian and French styles. Of all categories of Jewish prayer book the Passover Haggadah tends to be the most extensively and richly decorated. The narrative itself, the Rabbinic elaboration, the family meal, the symbolic foods and the fact that the story is told to children, provide added incentives for colorful elaboration. Even the size of the MS lends itself to be used and enjoyed at the Passover table on the eve of the festival for the family gathering known as the Seder. This Haggadah is outstanding for its rich decorative and representational art scattered throughout the text. 128 of its 322 pages are richly ornamented with fanciful figures and pictorial scenes that provide fascinating insights into Jewish life in medieval Spain. For instance, music and culture in general flourished in Barcelona and its environs, and the Jewish community was proud to be fully involved. Indeed, until the forced conversion of the Jewish population of Barcelona in 1401, Jewish musicians played a vital role in drawing the Jews and Christians closer together. It is not surprising, therefore, that a lively interest in music is clearly displayed throughout the MS: in all, twenty-eight different instruments appear in the illustrations. More intimate details, such as the pictures of the meal, take us straight into a Jewish home of the period, while the synagogue scene reflects 14th-c. conditions and traditions. The illustrations of the five rabbis of Bnei Brak, the four sons, the story of Abraham breaking the idols, and the Exodus (which is shown taking place on horseback in medieval costume), are of great historical value. The unrestrained humor of the artist is clear from the dogs and rabbits that romp through the pages of the MS. Commentary by Jeremy Schonfield, Raphael Loewe, David Goldstein, & Malachi Beit-Arie. Limited edition of 500 copies, bound in leather.
\$ 4810



18th c.

Perek Shirah.

[London, British Library, or.54 (OR.12,983)]
[0-948223-170] London, 1996. 8 x 13 cm, 2 vols, 34, 56 pp.

This charming 18th-c. Hebrew and Yiddish MS was probably written by Aaron Wolf Schreiber Herlingen of Gewitsch in Vienna. Its vellum leaves contain exquisite miniatures of many of the “worshippers” within magnificent scenes from nature. The "Perek Shirah", a 10th-c. text, reflects an acute awareness of the spiritual dimension of nature and the environment. It is a cosmic hymn to the Creator in which all of creation, including the winds, clouds, all species of birds, mammals and fish sing praises for their very existence. It opens with the promise that those who recite it "are assured of a place in the World to Come" and ends with the hope that their study will be transformed into good deeds that will win heavenly reward. The praises are expressed in the form of scriptural quotations, reflecting the Jewish belief in the interdependence of study and prayer. Commentary by Malachi Beit-Arie and Emile Schrijver, including a translation of the text by Jeremy Schonfield. Limited edition of 550 copies, bound in aged vellum and tooled after the original, housed in hand-marbled slipcase.



8th-
12th c.

Torah Scroll.

[London, Jews' College]

London, 1985. 115 x 50 cm, scroll mounted on board.

One of the oldest extant fragments of a Torah scroll. Although the date and country of origin is unknown, it is believed that this fragment originated from the Middle East and was written between the 8th and 12th centuries. Written on leather, it was found in the Cairo Geniza and is now held in the library of Jews' College. Each facsimile is supplied float-mounted on acid-free mount board and set in an elegant polished wood frame in dark oak with a discreet gold insert on the inner edge. Includes a message from Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks and a full description of the manuscript. Each facsimile is individually numbered on a brass plaque.
\$ 2300



18th c.

Me'ah Berakhot. One Hundred Blessings. An Illustrated Miniature Liturgical Compendium in Hebrew and Yiddish from 18th-Century Central Europe.

[New York, private collection]

[0-948223-146] London, 1994. 4 x 4.5 cm, 2 vols, 74, 109 pp.

This little book, in miniature format, is a remarkable example of the revival of Hebrew MS illumination in the 18th c. At that time, long after the invention of printing, it was recognized that a handwritten and finely illustrated book offered a sense of luxury and respect for religious ritual. Although the original (from central Europe) is now in the possession of a private collector in New York, the present facsimile edition makes it "accessible" again to connoisseurs of Jewish booklore and culture. Traditionally, pious Jews seek to recite blessings on at least 100 occasions daily. This unique MS of the Me'ah Berachot (the title means "one hundred blessings"), is a compendium of such blessings, each allocated to a time of day or to a special event. It gathers together morning prayers, Grace after Meals, prayers on retiring at night, (Qriat Sh'ema), petitions for the safety of travellers and many other texts to be recited at particular moments—on seeing a beautiful tree, on hearing thunder or on wearing a new garment for the first time. Since it also includes three blessings specifically related to womanly duties (mitzvot nashim)—on breadmaking, ritual bathing and kindling the Sabbath lights—the book was probably commissioned as a special gift to a woman. Such a splendid prayer book may well have been presented to a bride. Indeed it is a miniature handbook of Jewish life intended for Jews of all ages. Besides the beautifully written script, the MS contains an illuminated title-page and 29 miniature panels illustrating some of the activities associated with the blessings included. Each painting is headed by a cartouche containing the relevant blessing, preceded by directions on how to recite it, written in a more cursive Yiddish script. Three additional miniatures depict a variety of everyday genre scenes—lighting the Sabbath candles, family mealtimes, tending the garden, putting on new clothes, entering the ritual bath, and even the then common medical practice of bloodletting. Commentary by Iris Fishof. Limited edition of 550 copies, printed on vellum and bound in leather with sterling ornaments.



1476

The Kennicott Bible. An Introduction by Bezalel Narkiss and Aliza Cohen-Mushlin.

[Oxford, Bodleian Library, Kennicott 1]

[0-948223-006] London, 1985. 26 x 32 cm, 922 pp + commentary.

The Kennicott Bible is named after Benjamin Kennicott (1718-1783), the English Christian Hebraist who was educated and worked most of his life in Oxford. A Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, he continued the English tradition of studying the Hebrew bible. His pioneering work, comparing text variants of hundreds of Hebrew MSS worldwide, was published in his *Dissertatio Generalis*. In the course of his work he acquired this MS for the Radcliffe Library from where it was transferred to the Bodleian in 1872. In 200 years, only 30 art historians and scholars have been privileged to study the Kennicott Bible, one of the Bodleian's greatest treasures. The Bible, together with Rabbi David Kimchi's grammatical treatise, was copied by the scribe Moses Ibn Zabara in 1476 at the commission of Isaac, the son of Don Solomon di Braga of La Coruña in northwestern Spain. Executed almost 20 years before the final expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, at a time when they were already being harassed by the Spanish Inquisition, this MS shows what great importance the Jewish communities attached to the perpetuation of their heritage by investing in the production of an accurate and beautifully adorned Bible. From its inception the MS was planned as a lavish work as is witnessed in its 238 pages of illuminations, adorned with lively colors, burnished gold and silver leaf. The highly stylized figures—almost modern in their abstract rendering—delight the eye with the richness of their colors and varied compositions. The zoomorphic and anthropomorphic letters in the artist's colophon are a manifestation of his rich imagination. Joseph Ibn Hayyim created in his own individual and distinct style a unique masterpiece. King David on his throne, Jonah being swallowed by a fish, or Balaam as an astrologer consulting an astrolabe, are but a few of the text illustrations in the Kennicott Bible. Even Rabbi David Kimchi's grammatical treatise *SEFER MIKHLOL* was not copied as an austere text, but written within magnificently decorated arched pages, placed at the beginning and end of the Bible, possibly because the MS was commissioned for the youth, Isaac, in the hope that it might encourage his interest. Commentary by B. Narkiss & A. Cohen-Mushlin. Limited numbered edition of 500 copies, bound into a morocco goatskin box binding embossed on all sides. \$ 9625



c.1280

The Parma Psalter.

[Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, 1870 (de Rossi 510)]
 [0-948223-111] London, 1995. 10 x 13.5 cm, 452 pp + commentary.

Among the nearly 1,650 Hebrew MSS housed in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma that come down to us from the collection of the Christian Hebraist Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi (1742-1831), is MS 1870, a magnificent Psalter, written and decorated around 1280, possibly in Emilia in northern Italy. The work is one of the earliest and most important of all medieval Hebrew psalters. Its 452 pages contain the psalm texts in a clear, large vocalised Hebrew hand. Each chapter is illuminated and many are exquisitely illustrated with musical instruments or with scenes described in the text—extraordinary for a Hebrew manuscript of the period. Although its exact provenance is unknown it is clear that only a wealthy patron could have commissioned a MS so lavish and tasteful. Early copies of psalters with Abraham ibn Ezra's commentary on Psalms, as is the case here, are rare, and the Parma MS transmits interesting textual variants not found in the other versions. The illustrations in the MS—including numerous depictions of contemporary musical instruments—are particularly valuable for musicologists and art historians. In addition to the psalms one 8-page fascicle, added at a later date, contains the ceremonies for engagements, marriages, circumcisions and funerals, as well as for the end of a Sabbath followed by a Festival, times at which Psalms were especially recited. The rich decorations are characterized by the delicate use of harmonious colours; gold is used liberally but with sensitivity, the illuminator carefully balancing the Psalms and commentary with the images in the margin. Commentary, edited by Jeremy Schonfield, with contributions by Emmanuel Silver, Malachi Beit-Arié & Thérèse Metzger. Limited edition of 550 copies, bound in brown calfskin with gold stamping on the spine.
 \$ 2700



18th c.

Megillat Esther.

[Tel Aviv, private collection William Gross]
 [0-948223-251] London, 2006. Scroll, 10.8 x 168 cm, 64 pp
 (commentary).

Purim is a holiday of feasting and joy which celebrates the deliverance of the Jews of Persia during the reign of King Xerxes (485-465 BCE). The word Purim is derived from ‘Pur’ meaning lots, literally the lots cast by the Persians to decide when to execute the Jews. This story, recounted in the biblical book of Esther, is read publicly in synagogues each Purim. The reader recites it from a parchment scroll, known as a megillah. Over the centuries, Esther scrolls have become a symbol of celebration and continuity of Jewish life and they form the core of several major collections. The Gross family in Israel owns one of the finest collections in the world and their particular illuminated copy of the megillah is the basis of this facsimile edition. Written scrolls of Esther are not rare, but this megillah, written on fine parchment, is exceptional because the entire Purim story is illustrated in meticulous detail. Virtually every aspect of the Book of Esther is depicted in the miniature, where heroes and villains are playfully painted around the clear, square text to illustrate the victory of good over evil. There are scenes of baroque buildings and genteel characters in typical 18th-c. dress; even Haman’s sons hang in droll positions from the gallows. The wealth of detail contained within the intricately-drawn buildings and costumed figures adds weight to the theory that it was written in Germany around 1700. Although the exact date and location that the MS was commissioned remains a mystery, the words ‘STATT SHUSONN’ written in Latin letters above one of the illustrations at the beginning of the scroll reinforce the German provenance of the manuscript. Only one other Esther scroll, in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, is known to make use of Latin letters, and was written by the same scribe. Commentary by Emile Schrijver and Falk Wiesemann, with contribution by Muzi Wertheim and William Gross, edited by Jeremy Schonfield. Limited edition of 295 copies, printed on parchment and presented in a hand-tooled silver case. \$ 3995



1422

The Alba Bible.

[Toledo, Liria Palace, private collection, Duke of Alba]
[84-60418-650] London, 1992. 1030 pp.

The Alba Bible is not merely a superb example of Spanish book illumination, it is all that remains of one of the last attempts by intellectual Jews and Christians to heal the rifts that finally led to the calamity of expulsion. This facsimile was published as a tribute to and celebration of the reconciliation and renewal of understanding taking place in our own time. In 1422, during a lull in the often intensely anti-Jewish feeling in Spain, Don Luis de Guzmán, Grand Master of Calatrava, arrived at a decision that only by commissioning a Castilian Bible, translated by someone able to refer to the Hebrew and to compile a commentary reflecting the Jewish understanding of the texts, would Christians comprehend the differences between Christian and Jewish attitudes, and come to tolerate the other's views. Don Luis entrusted the work to Rabbi Moses Arragel who at first refused. By exposing the Jewish view he feared he might fuel antagonism towards Jews, and himself in particular. His protest sparked off a lively correspondence: the first 25 folios of the Alba Bible contain transcriptions of the detailed exchanges between the two men, documenting their negotiations up to the moment when the Rabbi finally agreed to take on the task. A number of Christian artists were employed to illustrate the text. What emerged is no less than a masterpiece. Known as the Alba Bible, after its eventual owner, it is the most important MS to have survived from the reign of King John II. Its 513 folios and 334 miniatures make it a powerful work of visual art but equally significant is the vast commentary it contains. Rabbi Moses showed great independence and courage, and his translation and commentary make few concessions to Christian thinking. It is rich in extracts not only from rabbinical writings such as the Targumim, Midrashim and Talmud, but also from later works such as the Zohar—the source book of Jewish mysticism. Rabbi Moses may well have given the artists detailed instructions on the illustrations, furnishing them with specifically Jewish interpretations of biblical scenes. The resulting images are also very important as cultural records, since contemporary weapons, musical instruments, furniture and costumes are all depicted. The cooperation between the Christian customer and the Jewish author-translator makes the Alba Bible a vital element in the ancient and troubled Christian-Hebraic tradition. Limited numbered edition of 500 copies, bound in tooled leather.
\$ 32500

