

ly of birds sang to him as to us too.

ice" 29 April 1928 on the back of a photograph given to Kamila Stossler
in Prague where Mozart lived during the premiere of Don Giovanni.

This sixties she in her twenties
of their letters, fervently.

Om



David... 18... m

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5/11 1917

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REVIEWS

The Duke of Alba's Castilian Bible

Limited edition 500 copies
Published by Facsimile Editions Ltd, 1992
513 folios numbered 1-513 (1026 pages)
334 miniatures
16 x 11.5 (40.5 x 29.5)
Two Volumes, \$26,000
www.facsimile-editions.com

Reviewer: Frances Spiegel

HISTORY OF THE ALBA BIBLE

The manuscript known as the Alba Bible came into existence because of one man's sincere wish to heal a growing chasm between the Jews and Christians of fifteenth-century Castile. In the 500 years before 1492, Spain witnessed considerable development in Sephardic Jewish culture and education. During these centuries of peaceful co-existence, Jews translated the classics, making them available to wider audiences. Works by Plato and Aristotle and Maimonides' "Guide to the Perplexed," one of the great intellectual Jewish works, were translated from Arabic into Hebrew and Latin, thus influencing Christian scholars such as Albertus Magnus and his student, Thomas Aquinas.

However, by the 1420s, Judeo-Christian relations had reached an all-time low with anti-Semitic feelings running wild. In 1422, because of the deteriorating situation, a high-ranking Spanish churchman, Don Luis de Guzmán of Maqueda, Catholic Grand Master of Calatrava, asked a local scholar, Rabbi Moses de Arragel of Guadalajara, to translate the Hebrew Bible into the local vernacular, Castilian. It was to be accompanied by a commentary explaining the Jewish point of view. Guzmán believed Christians would

gain a better understanding of Jewish doctrine and this would in turn improve relations between the two religions.

Arragel had serious reservations about this project. Firstly, he reminded Guzmán that the Jewish religion prohibits figurative illustration. (A team of Christian illuminators was subsequently engaged to illustrate the text. The illustrations show that they were artists of varying levels of skill, and were most probably local artisans since all the illuminations were painted in the local regional style.) Secondly, Arragel fervently believed that creating such a manuscript would only highlight conflicts between the religions rather than encourage understanding. It could even expose Jews, and himself, to further attack. Perhaps he was right. Guzmán's efforts failed, and the worsening relations between Jews and Christians culminated with the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.

The script Arragel used for the Bible is Gothic bookscript, or *textualis*, a popular script of the time. The commentary surrounding the main text is written in a condensed hand. The difference between the two scripts gives the impression of more than one scribe, but it was probably written entirely by Rabbi Moses of Arragel who was a well-known calligrapher and artist in the area. The commentary includes extracts drawn from rabbinical writings such as the Talmud, Targumin, Midrashim and the Zohar, the source of Jewish mysticism. Despite Arragel's perseverance in giving the Jewish point of view, Christian influences are visi-

ble. For example, there is an entire passage from the Christian Latin Vulgate Bible.

Little is known of Arragel's activities after he finished the manuscript in Maqueda on Friday, June 21, 1430. Although he had been promised a generous remuneration, he was not paid for his work. The manuscript disappeared for almost two hundred years until rediscovered in the Library of the Liria Palace, seat of the Grand Duke of Alba and Berwick, from whom it takes its name.

In 1992, wishing to repair the damage done five hundred years earlier, King Juan Carlos officially welcomed Jews back to Spain. To commemorate this event, the Duke of Alba allowed the production of a limited facsimile edition of 500 copies. The bible's new patron would be Señor Mauricio Hatchwell Toledano, a founding member of the Fundacion Amigos de Sefarad. In his quest for perfection, Señor Toledano gave the following instructions to Michael and Linda Falter of Facsimile Editions, London: "I want the most beautiful facsimile ever produced, no more, no less..." And this is precisely what he got.

In total there are 513 folios with 344 miniatures. The first 25 folios reproduce the lively correspondence that took place between Arragel and Guzmán. The Alba Bible is not only a sound record of the history and social conditions relating to Jews at the time, but it is also a very fine piece of visual art.

Folio 1 verso (page 58) shows Don Luis de Guzmán ordering Rabbi Moses of Arragel to translate the Hebrew Bible into Castilian.

Arragel is shown with uncut hair and a beard in accordance with a statute of January 2, 1412, which ordered Jewish men to have long hair and beards. Throughout the manuscript Jews are depicted in this way. Folio 1v has an almost full-page border, highly decorated with flowers and foliage. The border is occupied by amusing characters and bizarre creatures typical of manuscripts of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. The outstanding feature of this page is the purple and gold capital P standing approximately half the height of the column to show its importance in the text. The P grows out of the border at its head and base and the infill of the P's counter space echoes the border's floral pattern. Since manuscript pages were not numbered, a landmark as richly decorated as this would have served as a mnemonic to help the reader navigate the manuscript.

Folio 26 recto is another landmark page: "In the beginning..." It is dominated by a luxuriously gilded and decorated rectangle indicating the beginning of the Book of Genesis. The rectangular border gives a frame to the gold emblazoned initial. The initial is symmetrically decorated inside and out with an intricate pattern of pink flowers on a blue background. The four lines of text above the initial are also gilded.

Folio 59 recto shows the start of the Book of Exodus. This page has a full-height bar border out of which grows green and blue foliage. The border appears to rise from a winged creature at the foot of the page. A large initial stands alone and is intricately decorated.

The importance of initials is shown by their height in relation to the text. The main initial on this page stands eleven lines tall whereas the smaller initials are only four lines tall. The smaller initials are typically red and blue alternately. Not all the initials in the Alba Bible are gilded or, indeed, highly elaborate — many are quite simple. For example, folios 320 verso and 325 recto show very simple initials drawn in blue and decorated with red ink.

There are many half- and full-page illustrations throughout the Alba Bible. One such illustration, "Cain Kills Abel," (folio 29 verso), shows Arragel's interpretation of the event. A similar interpretation is given in *The Zohar*, the principal cabalistic work of Judaism. On the same folio is a heavily gilded initial standing six lines tall. It is embellished with a symmetrical pattern in blue ink surrounded by a linear pattern that gives way to elaborate curly lines. These increase the overall height of the initial to 17 lines thus giving it a greater importance than its six lines might imply.

My favorite folio is 72 verso (page 58). This full-page miniature portrays Moses presenting the Law to Israel. He is standing barefoot on Mount Sinai, his head adorned with rays. Moses holds the two tablets of the law which are disproportionately larger than any other item in the miniature. The text of the Ten Commandments is written in two columns of five lines each and is arranged asymmetrically. If you look closely, the original guidelines drawn by the scribe are visible between the tablets. At the foot of the miniature is a group of Hebrews. Looking closely to the

right of the group, there seems to be a Jewish caricature with hunch back and hooked nose! Perhaps Arragel's fears were justified and the illuminators used this opportunity to ridicule the Jews.

THE PRODUCTION OF THE FACSIMILE

The details of the production of the facsimile edition are just as interesting as the Bible itself. The paper was milled in Italy, carefully formulated to feel and look like the original vellum. Binding expert James Brockman disbound the pages of the manuscript so that each page could be laid flat for photography. The photography was carried out by Israeli photographer David Harris. Both experts worked on site at the Palace de Liria in Madrid. A large-format film, specially manufactured in a single batch, was used to ensure the correct color balance. The proofs of every page were meticulously compared to the originals and examined for faults.

Each raised gold dot and every minute brush stroke was examined and faithfully reproduced using a unique process developed by Linda and Michael Falter. The metal leaf is applied individually to every illustration and the layers are slowly built up so that the facsimile has the raised appearance and texture of the original. As the original binding no longer exists, a morocco goatskin Mud'jar-style binding of the period on wooden boards, blind-tooled with interlacing geometric designs and finished with solid brass clasps on leather thongs, was faithfully copied. The facsimile consists of two volumes of equal importance: the Bible itself and its companion commentary.



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Facsimile Editions Limited
40 Hamilton Terrace
London NW8 9UJ
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7286 0071
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7266 3927

www.facsimile-editions.com