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Lives and Afterlives



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the Medieval
Castle



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Blondel:
The Lionheart's
Minstrel

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Below right: Folio 1 verso. Guzman orders Rabbi Arragel to translate the Hebrew Bible

The Alba Bible
 Limited edition 500
 copies
 Published by
 Facsimile Editions
 Ltd
 513 folios numbered 1-513
 (1026 pages)
 334 miniatures
 US\$ 26,000.00
 ISBN 84 60418 650

Not many could afford a copy of *The Alba Bible* but those who can will be investing in something very, very special. This facsimile edition, manufactured to the most exacting standards, measures approximately

405 x 295 x 110mm (16" x 11.5" x 4.5"). It contains 513 folios with 334 exquisite miniatures.

The Background to *The Alba Bible*

The *Alba Bible* exists because of one man's desire to heal the rift between Jews and Christians of 15th century Castile. In the five hundred years before 1492 Spain saw rapid developments in Sephardic Jewish culture and education. During the earlier centuries of peaceful co-existence Jews translated the classics making them available to wider audiences.

But, by the 1420s Judeo-Christian relations were explosive with anti-Semitic feelings. In 1422 Don Luis de Guzmán of Maqueda, a high-ranking Spanish Churchman, Catholic Grand Master of Calatrava, asked a local scholar, Rabbi Moses de Arragel of Guadalajara, to translate the Hebrew bible into 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 misgivings and reminded Guzmán that the Jewish religion prohibits illuminated manuscripts. Eventually a team of Christian illuminators was engaged to illustrate the text. Arragel believed that creating such a manuscript would only highlight conflicts between the religions rather than encourage understanding. It could 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.

After its completion in 1430 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.

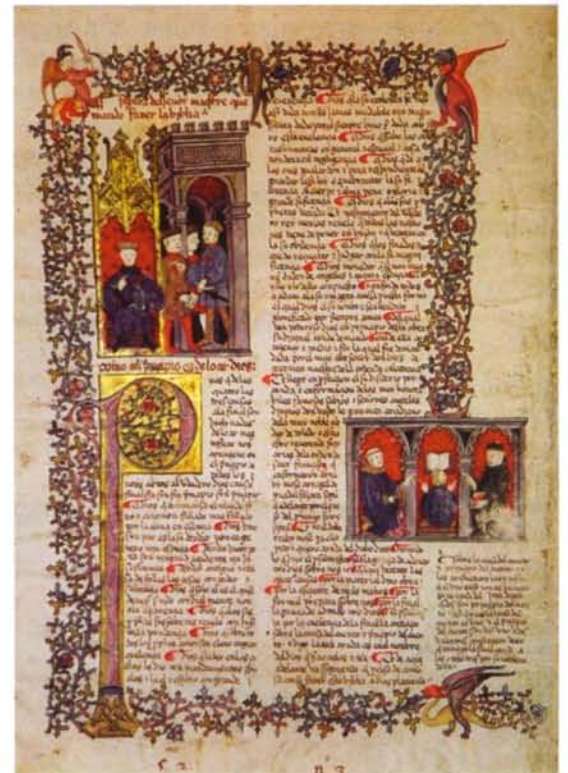
In 1992, wishing to repair the damage done five hundred years earlier, King Juan Carlos revoked the order of the Expulsion and officially welcomed Jews and their descendants, and all Jews, back to Spain. To commemorate this event the Duke of Alba allowed the production of a limited edition of 500 copies. The bible's new patron would be Señor Mauricio Hatchwell Toledano, a founder member of the Fundacion Amigos de Sefarad.

The Artwork of the Bible

The first twenty-five folios reproduce the lively correspondence between Arragel and Guzmán. The *Alba* 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.



Above: Folio 72 verso



Folio 1 verso 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 2nd January 1412 that forced Jews to have long hair and beards. Throughout the manuscript Jews are depicted in this way.

On Folio 72 verso Moses is shown presenting the Law to Israel. Moses holds the two tablets of the law which are disproportionately larger than any other item in the miniature. At the foot of the miniature is a group of Hebrews. Look closely to the right of the group. There seems to be a caricature of a Jew 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

Paper for this facsimile was milled in Italy, carefully formulated to feel and look like the original vellum. The pages of the manuscript were photographed using large-format film and proofs were meticulously compared to the originals and examined for faults. The quires are hand-sewn and the quire formation of the original Alba Bible has been faithfully reproduced.

Each raised gold dot and every minute brush-stroke was reproduced using a unique process developed by Linda and Michael Falter. The metal leaf is applied individually to every illustration and the layers slowly built up so that the facsimile has the raised appearance and texture of the original.

The facsimile consists of two volumes, the Bible itself and its companion commentary. Señor Hatchwell invited leading experts to analyse and explain the manuscript. Under the editorship of Jeremy Schonfield, acknowledged for his expertise in Jewish

culture and medieval manuscripts, the manuscript is set in its historical context.

Shlomo Ben-Ami, former Israeli Ambassador to Spain, explains the contribution to Spanish civilization of Sephardi Jewry. Sonia Fellous-Rozenblat, Professor of Jewish Art at the Institut Nationale de Langues et Civilization Orientale, Paris, looks at the background to the commissioning of the manuscript and explores the symbolism of its iconography. Adriaan Keller, Doctoral researcher at Leiden University, investigated the palaeography and codicology of the manuscript. Moshe Lazar, Professor of Comparative Literature at U.C.L.A., studies the bible translation and the commentary appearing in the manuscript. Angus McKay, Professor of Medieval Spanish History at the University of Edinburgh, discusses Jewish-Christian relations in Spain at the period of the *Alba Bible*.

Only 500 copies of the facsimile and its companion were produced. Photographic plates have now been destroyed to ensure the fidelity of the facsimile.

Frances Spiegel

Folios from The Alba Bible, reproduced by courtesy of Mauricio Hatchwell Toledano. Full details of the facsimile edition of the Alba Bible may be found at www.facsimile-editions.com

Below: Details of the group of Hebrews

