

Facsimile editions

Michael and Linda Falter have produced a facsimile of the Kennicott Bible, which is over five hundred years old

'In the beginning . . .'

As I touched the page on which these words were printed, for a moment I felt that I was truly going back in time. In actual fact those words, in Hebrew had only been printed about a year before but in essence they went back to 1476. For that brief moment though I was with the first scribe, who wrote those words for the very first time.

It was in 1476, when a Bible (the Old Testament) was commissioned by Isaac, the son of Don Solomon de Braga of La Coruna in North Western Spain, for his young son.

It also carried a grammatical treatise, possibly included in the hope of catching the boy's interest.

This Bible was eventually offered for sale to Benjamin Kennicott, an English Christian Hebraist who lived and worked in Oxford and who purchased it for the Radcliffe

Libraries for fifty guineas in 1771. It was transferred to the Bodleian in 1872 where it has become one of their greatest treasures. In 200 years only 30 people have been allowed to study it. Now, with the facsimile edition no-one is able to do so. For Michael and Linda Falter have achieved a quality with their facsimile of the Kennicott Bible that to see and touch it is as if you were seeing and touching the original.

Kennicott himself married a woman who studied Hebrew and who helped him in his work. They worked together as a team and Michael and Linda like to remember that as they work together in their publishing.

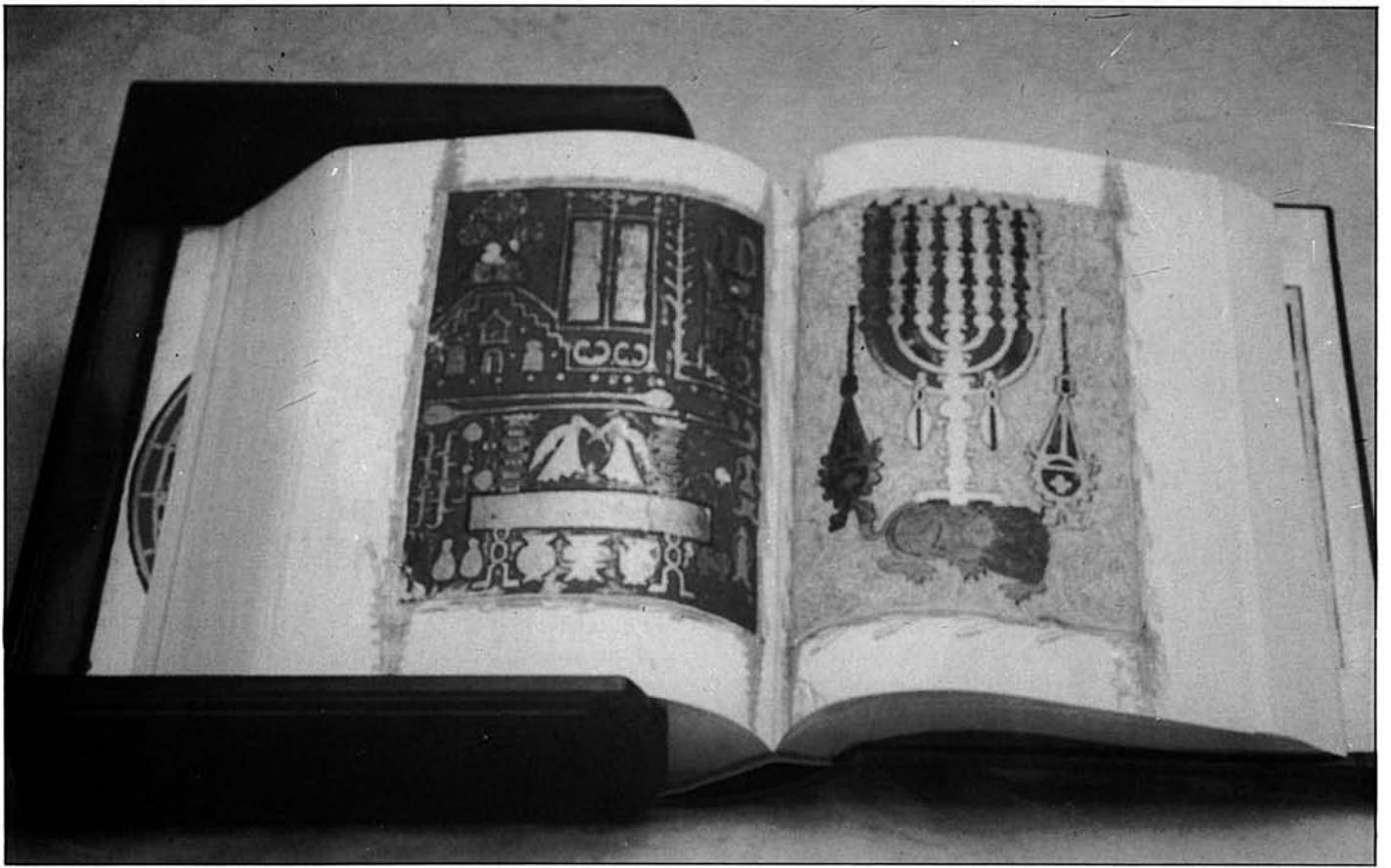
The real beginnings of *Facsimile Editions* was probably in 1980 when Michael Falter went to the British Museum and saw there the collection of illuminated Hebrew manuscripts. His background is printing —

third generation — and he is a graduate of the London College of Printing. After twelve years though he wanted to get away from it and he spent five years in the micro-computer business.

He did possess three antique presses dated from 1851 and always at the back of his mind was the idea of setting up a shop somewhere and reprinting the sort of thing that would have been printed at that time.

But looking at the fabulous manuscripts in the Museum, Michael thought that rather than reproduce the books and pamphlets from 1851 it would be lovely to reproduce something like these. Having had the thought, he had absolutely no idea whom he should approach, where to go or what to do.

Eventually through a friend, Dr David Patterson, at Oxford the idea was put before the Senior Assistant Librarian of the Bodleian





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whose immediate reaction was that there was only one book to attempt and that was the Kennicott Bible. The week that Michael met Linda was the week that they went to see the original Bible which was 510 years old. Michael describes sitting in front of it and realising that he was as close to the Bible as were the original scribe and illuminator and feeling very excited. He was seeing this very important book which so few people in recent years had been able to see and which had never been on display.

Starting together

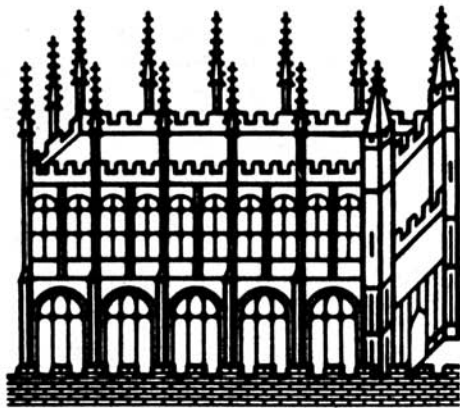
The Bodleian gave their decision that the book should be reproduced. Also, Linda and Michael decided to marry! Linda had studied art, so together they made a team that began to confidently move forward to achieve their aim. At that time, they will say, they were not aware of the complete extent of what was involved. This very confidence actually led to the perfection of the facsimile because they never doubted that it could be done.

It took two years to find the paper, to discover what the formulation should be so that it would reproduce as closely as possible the parchment of the original, and to discover how to do the gold. Discover too, how to print on the paper, for unlike other facsimiles, which use a coated paper, they used a vegetable paper which feels like parchment but is so greasy that it is difficult to print on successfully. Also it moves slightly with the climatic conditions.

It was so unstable that the eventual printer had to change the air conditioning equipment in his factory in order to be able to print on this paper. During the two year period the printer had to be found. They were in touch with people all over the world, sending specifications, transparencies and photographs to all the major printing houses that they could find. It also meant meeting many people, either going to them or receiving them here.

Their desire that the Bible should be absolutely right has led to it being said that whilst, generally speaking, when you open a facsimile you feel that it is one because it is on coated paper and you therefore know that it is not a manuscript, the Kennicott is different, because you get much more of the feel of parchment.

All this was very difficult to achieve and Michael and Linda went to great lengths to get it right. A printer was eventually found in Italy; after failing for so long to find the sort of person that they were looking for. As Michael points out, it is not the machinery or the craftsman. It is all the best machinery and



BODLEIAN LIBRARY, OXFORD

the best craftsmen; it is the will and the desire of the man in charge who must have a philosophy that only the best is good enough and it does not matter whether money is made or lost but that a particular result is achieved.

With a contract agreed, it was estimated that the work would take six weeks on a five colour machine. The working hours were from eight in the morning until eight in the evening, but in fact they usually finished at nine, ten or even later, on six days a week, and it took five and a half months! Michael and Linda were there every day checking each sheet for colour and accuracy. They had moved over to Milan for the period of printing for by then they had a son, Gideon.

They even rented a studio so that one or other of their mothers could go out to look after him; they each did stints of three weeks!

It is probably not possible for anyone not

actually present to imagine the work involved. Not just to get it done but that it should be as perfect as possible. Because the workers were so dedicated to the task, it made things that much easier, for all the time the colours had to be changed and it could take anything up to twenty four hours to get the colours exactly right. Eventually it was finished to the satisfaction of all concerned. Then came the task of promotion and for this again, Michael and Linda have had to travel, going to various book fairs and enabling people to see the facsimile of this interesting and important work.

Limited edition

At the Jerusalem Book Fair it was a main event and people stood in throngs to see it from nine in the morning until eleven at night.

It has 922 pages of which 238 are illuminated with colours, burnished gold and silver leaf. The gold and silver leaf was applied by hand by seven craftsmen working simultaneously and this work alone took four months.

The box binding was difficult to copy as it is embossed in minute detail on all six sides, in an extremely rare style. Hand made dyes were made for this, to emboss the soft morocco goatskin. The edges of each leaf are gilt with 23 carat gold. Looking through the book one can see the marks and stains that the years have brought. Of interest is the way in which the scribe worked round the natural holes in the skin, the doodle of a tiny head on

one of the pages, the illustration of Jonah being swallowed head first by a large fish.

Although much of the illumination gives illustrations of those things appertaining to the Jewish life and faith some do not. A delight is the one of an army of cats attacking a castle defended by mice, but one would need to spend hours studying each page to gain the full enjoyment of both the illuminator and the scribe's work.

The edition is limited to 550 copies and many have already found their way into some prestigious places. Perhaps what makes this facsimile so wonderful, is that apart from its value as an art creation it may be read and used within the family today and it has been bought for just that purpose for its language has not changed since it was first copied.

This book is a thing of beauty and the pride which the original craftsmen had in their work over 500 years ago has been matched by the publishers and craftsmen who have produced the facsimile.

This however, is not the end of the story for Michael and Linda Falter. In a way it is just the beginning for there are four new projects on the way. Next to come will be the Rothschild Miscellany, the original being in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. It is a book of Hebrew prayers.

Looking through the photographs one can see that this book is very beautifully illuminated. To bring it a little nearer to the view of the people of today, the search and dedication must continue so that the facsimile is as perfect as can possibly be, nothing else will satisfy the publishers.



The world's foremost publisher of illuminated manuscripts

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