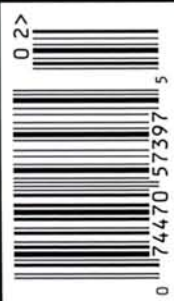


Letter Arts Review

OP EEN DAG DO
KEN ZE OP ZW
ERMEN UIT
OVER DE STAD
EN NESTELDEN
ZICH WE GAVE
N ZE TE ETEN
VAN ONSZELF O
P EEN DAG WAR
EN ZE VERDWE
NEN MAAR ZE B
LEVEN'S NACHTS
WORDEN WE BE
ZOCHT IN ONZE
EIGEN VREEMD
KLEURIGE DROM
EN PETER VERHELT



\$17.50



Above: folios 443R and 442V.
Below: detail from the book of Jonah, folio 305R.



BOOK REVIEW

The Kennicott Bible

A facsimile edition of 500 numbered copies
Published by Facsimile Editions Ltd
32 x 26.2 x 10 cm
992 pages, 238 illuminated pages
Commentary Volume: Professor Bezael Narkiss
and Dr Aliza Cohen-Mushlin

The Kennicott Bible (Oxford, Bodleian Lib., MS Kennicott 1) is one of the Bodleian Library's greatest treasures. Named after Benjamin Kennicott (1718-1783), renowned scholar of the Hebrew Bible, who acquired it in 1771, the Kennicott is one of the most exquisitely illuminated Spanish medieval manuscripts in existence. It has survived in remarkably good condition.

THE ORIGINAL · The original manuscript was written in north-western

Spain some sixteen years before the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. Its creation reflected the importance that Jewish communities attached to the continuation of their history and heritage. Isaac, son of Don Solomon di Braga, a businessman of La Coruña, commissioned the scribe Moses Ibn Zabara, to copy the Tanach (Old Testament). The fully massorated and vocalised bible was copied together with a grammatical treatise entitled *Sefer Mikhlo*, written by Rabbi David Kimchi, known as RaDaK. The script is in the Sephardi style typical of medieval manuscripts from Spain and Portugal. In the colophon, Moses Ibn Zabara tells us that he finished the work in the town of La Coruña, in the province of Galicia in

north-west Spain, on Wednesday, the third day of the month of Av in the year 5236 from the creation (24th July 1476). He also states that he was responsible for the text of all twenty-four books of the Bible.

The Bible is divided into three sections by exquisitely decorated carpet pages. Ornamental carpet pages were a typical form of decoration found in medieval manuscripts. Carpet pages contain no text and are vibrantly decorated with dazzling colour and complicated patterns. The pages were used to divide the Old Testament into three distinctive sections: the Pentateuch, Prophets and Hagiographa.

This lavish work of art contains 922 pages, two hundred and thirty-eight of which are luxuriously decorated with beautiful paintings all executed in lively color and illuminated with burnished gold and silver leaf. The manuscript also contains 24 canonical book headings and 49 parashah headings. The illuminations were carried out by Joseph Ibn Hayyim, a Spanish artist of Jewish origin. As far as is known Ibn Hayyim signed only one manuscript, the Kennicott, and is one of the few illuminators whose name was recorded. Ibn Hayyim's colophon reads: "I Joseph Ibn Hayyim illustrated this book, and I finished it" (Folio 447r). The highly stylized characters, with their vibrant colour and intricate detail, appear almost modern



Ibn Hayyim's colophon, folio 447R.

and provide a rare insight into the artist's rich imagination.

THE FACSIMILE · The hand-written manuscript has been reproduced with the close cooperation of the Bodleian Library. It is an astonishingly beautiful facsimile edition. Its completion took five and a half years and its quality is outstanding. This is due to the exceptionally fine condition of the original manuscript coupled with the untiring quest for perfection at every step of this reproduction by the publishers, Michael and Linda Falter of Facsimile Editions.

Because disbinding of the manuscript was not allowed, the task of photographing the Kennicott in its original box binding was extremely difficult. The photographers at the Bodleian Library prepared a set of proofs that were compared to the original manuscript. Ibn Hayyim used up to 24 different colors in a single square inch of painting so the task of color matching required a very special expertise. In total it took four sets of proofs to achieve this. The extensive gold and silver gilding of these magnificent paintings was completed by a team of craftsmen applying leaf by hand to each illumination.

Good photography is just one of the many factors that go into a facsimile of this type. The paper used for the reproduction was of vital importance. Made by one of the oldest Italian paper mills,

it not only has the appearance of the original parchment but also has an identical thickness, weight and opacity. It took more than a year to satisfy the publishers that the final product looked and felt exactly like real parchment so much so that, on first examination, many experts thought it was the real thing!

Moses Ibn Zabara would have purchased the best parchment available at the time but sometimes holes in the skins were inevitable. Any holes that occurred in the original have been cut in the same positions in the facsimile.

The style of the Hispano-Moresque box binding is extremely rare and of very high quality. It is this high quality that has preserved the Kennicott for more than five hundred years. The original binding is embossed on all six surfaces, blind-tooled and decorated with cut-out endpapers that echo the design of the carpet pages.

Recreating such a binding proved to be an expensive and complicated process. Brass dies, created by tracing the original binding's designs, were used to emboss the soft morocco goatskin.

COMMENTARY VOLUME · The accompanying study of the Kennicott Bible and its illuminations was written by Bezalel Narkiss, founder of the Centre for Jewish Art, Jerusalem, and Dr Aliza Cohen-Mushlin, its Director.

The authors look at the physical

attributes of the Kennicott together with its history and design. The contribution of Joseph Ibn Hayyim to Spanish art is explored in detail.

The commentary volume, when read alongside the manuscript, will provide a better understanding of the Kennicott. The following extract tells how the manuscript came to survive in such good condition and also explains what is known of the manuscript's history:

"Isaac di Braga, who must have had family and commercial connections with Portugal, probably first went there before leaving for some other part of Europe. Throughout his flight, his precious Bible accompanied him; had he left Spain without it, the manuscript could not have survived the edict of Manuel I of Portugal ordering all Hebrew books in his kingdom to be burnt. We have no idea of where Isaac ultimately settled, or whether he or one of his heirs was forced to sell the Bible in order to survive. With no other signature in it and no external evidence of other owners before it came into the hands of Benjamin Kennicott in Oxford, this part of the history of the Bible still remains a mystery."

PRESENTATION

Each volume is numbered by hand inside the leather binding. The two volumes are presented in an elegant velvet-lined portfolio box accompanied by a numbered certificate carrying the stamp of the Bodleian Library.

At the completion of the edition, the printing plates were destroyed, in accordance with Jewish law, to protect the significant investment value of each copy. Facsimile Editions have created a book of unparalleled, consummate beauty. It is thanks to the alliance of the Bodleian Library and Facsimile Editions that the manuscript can now be enjoyed by millions as facsimiles of the Kennicott can now be studied in university libraries around the world.

—Frances Spiegel

The photographs of the facsimile of the Kennicott Bible are copyright Facsimile Editions Limited 2007.