

March/April 1988



הַיְהוָה וְהָאֱלֹהִים וְכֵן יִבְרָכְךָ  
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אשר יצאנו ממצרים ונעלה אל הרי סיני וישבנו לפני ה' בנגד הר סיני

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והוא שיהיה כבודו של המלך  
ועל ידי זה יתקן כל הענינים  
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המלכות וזהו חשבון המלכות



No. 31

*Minotaure*  
Opera by the sea  
The wandering codex  
Eve, the serpent, and death

# Franco Maria Ricci



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ספר י"ט הנהגה במחשבת הקדושים כחשד כעב וזוהי חרסות  
וזה המלך המלך יחזקאל



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# The wandering codex

At the end of the eighteenth century Benjamin Kennicot, a Protestant canon from Christ Church Oxford, and Giovan Bernardo De Rossi, Catholic scholar, priest and professor at Parma University, embarked, each independently of the other, on the daunting task of collating and evaluating all the variant readings of the Hebrew Old Testament. With the painstaking thoroughness so characteristic of the period, the two Hebraists omitted nothing that might yield information, visiting great public libraries, small private collections, and making contact with the owners of each individual manuscript, incunabulum or old publication that contained even the smallest fragment of the text they sought to elucidate. A substantial number of codices – including many rare examples – came into their possession and now constitute the Hebrew collections that are the pride of the Bodleian Library and the Biblioteca Palatina at Parma. This passionate quest for unpublished material, while producing dramatic results in the field of philology, also made a huge body of research data available to scholars when two major works were published: Kennicot's *Dissertatio Generalis in Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum* (Brno, 1738), and De Rossi's *Variae Lectiones Veteris Testamenti* (Parma, 1784). It is in the *Variae Lectiones* that we first hear of a remarkable manuscript known as the *Miscellanea Rothschild*, today in the possession of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, but at the time of De Rossi's discovery, part of the patrimony of the Jewish community of Gorizia. Both scholars were struck by its beauty – “*elegantissimae hic adsunt picturae*” – although they generally paid little attention to the aesthetic qualities of the manuscripts they studied. We do not know how the *Miscellanea* came to be in Gorizia, but we can record the emblematic and frequently dramatic events that brought it to Jerusalem. Between the years 1832 and 1835 it was in the collection of a rich and generous merchant, Salomone de

## *The Miscellanea Rothschild* by Luisa Mortara Ottolenghi

In the second half of the fifteenth century, in an unknown city in northern Italy, a Hebrew scribe filled almost a thousand pages with a miscellaneous collection of sacred and secular literature. A Christian miniaturist bent over the same folios – embellishing them with ornaments and scenes that give us a glimpse of the daily life of Italian Jews in their homes and synagogues. Thus a marvelous work was born from the collaboration of men belonging to different faiths and communities. It was destined to pass through many hands and many countries, until, thanks to the generosity of its last proprietor, Baron James de Rothschild, it found a home at last in the Israel Museum of Jerusalem.

Parente, at Trieste. In 1855 it was sold in Paris to the Rothschild family, and remained in their collection until 1942, when it was stolen by the Nazis during the Occupation and disappeared completely. The manuscript was considered irredeemably lost until, at the beginning of the fifties, it mysteriously reappeared in New York and subsequently remained for two years in the library of the New York Jewish Theological Seminary. The principal of this institution was an extremely fine scholar, Alexander Marx, who recognized the manuscript for what it was and returned it to the Rothschild family in London. They in turn expressed their gratitude through the princely gift of another illustrated Hebrew manuscript – this time of Florentine origin – the *Mahzor Rothschild*. Baron James de Rothschild, well known as a committed Zionist, felt that the *Miscellanea* should be freely available to the public, and therefore donated it in 1957 to the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem. In 1965 it was transferred to its current home at the Israel Museum. A wandering Jewish manuscript then, evoking the wanderings of so many Jews during the past two hundred years in its long journey from the ghetto of Gorizia to the tranquillity of Trieste, from the ease and plenty of Paris to the oppression of Germany, from New York and London, cities of freedom, to Jerusalem, city of hope. The two eighteenth century Hebraists also provide us with a brief outline of

### Title page

The Author of the Sefer Sod-a-Sodot in His Studio, detail, 418v.

*Miscellanea Rothschild*, manuscript 180/51, c. 1470-1475, 212 x 156 mm (8 1/4 x 6 in.). The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

### Preceding pages

Right: Decorative Motifs, 163v.

Left: The Battle of Sihon and Og. Jacob Fights with the Angel, 164r.

*Miscellanea Rothschild*.

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

### Facing page

David the Psalmist, 1v.

*Miscellanea Rothschild*.

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.





# The wandering codex

the texts contained in this volume of 473 folios (946 pages). There are some Biblical texts with their rabbinical commentary – Psalms, the Book of Job, Proverbs – the Josippon of Joseph ben Gorion, fables ascribed to Aesop. The reality, however, is a good deal more complicated. Alongside the Hagiographers and Pseudo-Joseph are around seventy texts copied on the finest parchment by highly skilled scribes: prayer rituals for the whole year, philosophical works by Maimonides, Pseudo-Aristotle and other Sephardic, Ashkenazic and Italian philosophers, historical and moral treatises, rules of astrology and numismatics, and discussions of Cabala. Ample space is accorded to some splendidly illustrated fables, both joyful and moralistic. Mashal ha-Qadmoni (Parable of the Oriental), the Hebrew equivalent of the fables of Aesop or Phaedrus, and “Prince and Hermit”, whose theme is taken from the “Legend of Barlaam and Josaphat”, account for around 250 pages of the codex.

The Miscellanea is therefore an anthology, but of a particularly complex kind. It seems intended to provide a portable library for a cultured, well-educated reader. Kennicot and De Rossi believed that the compilation was made at the end of the fourteenth century (thus assigning it a date about a century too early), but gave no opinion as to the place of origin.

Both date and place of origin still constitute a problem. Only recently has a systematic study of every aspect of the codex been undertaken, with the aim of achieving a better understanding of the social milieu from which it originated, and of analysing the palaeographic characteristics of the manuscript while drawing out the most significant liturgical themes contained in the ceremonial sections. Under the auspices of the Israel Museum of Jerusalem, a group of scholars have embarked on this work, thanks to the initiative of a new London-based publishing house, Facsimile Editions, which is producing

a complete edition of the manuscript in five hundred numbered copies. Extreme care is being taken to ensure that the facsimile is true to the original down to the smallest detail. A companion volume, combining scientific scholarship with readability, will also be published, and will contain a series of explanatory studies by Italian and Israeli scholars on the artistic and cultural significance of the codex.

The most complex area is that of the illumination. Of the 946 pages that make up the Rothschild codex, 816 are adorned with decorative panels, painted motifs included within the text, and marginal or full page illustrations – frequently juxtaposed to the text they explain or complete. Even at first glance one is struck by the subtlety and extraordinary quality of this work, undoubtedly the product of one of the most important miniaturist workshops of the second half of the fifteenth century. Having said all this, it is surprising that no convincing hypothesis has ever been offered as to the identity of the artists who carried out work of such outstanding quality. In spite of the impressive bibliography relating to the codex, critical attention up till now has focused on its significance to Jewish art, while the major role it has played in the complex development of the Italian miniature has been comparatively neglected. It was first suggested – by Müller-Schlosser in 1898 – that the codex was Paduan, dating from the second half of the fifteenth century. In 1930, however, Israel Levi aligned himself with De Rossi’s theory in proposing the second half of the fourteenth century as a more probable date. Historians of Jewish art who have worked more recently on the manuscript have generally inclined towards the view that it is the product of Northern Italian miniaturists, possibly though not certainly of Ferraran origin, and that it dates from around 1460-1480. Cecil Roth, the eminent historian of Italian Judaism, diverges from this view in dating the codex as late as 1520 and

ascribing its origin to Mantua. Ulrike Bauer-Eberhard’s approach has been entirely different. She was the first scholar to approach the study of the miniatures in the Miscellanea through the techniques of stylistic analysis. Following a process of rigorous comparison, she felt able to nominate the great Venetian miniaturist Leonardo Bellini as the artist responsible for these illuminations. My own research has been carried out using similar techniques, taking into account both the development of manuscript illumination and the characteristics of Italian Jewish culture.

The results of this research – already presented at a number of conferences – leads me to believe that the manuscript was probably composed in Cremona between 1465 and 1477, in or around the De Predis workshop.

Every one of these theories bears examination, but none of them conclusively solves the problem of the codex, which has a unique artistic and symbolic significance for the Italian Jewish community. We must now return to first principles and make a fresh start in our study of the manuscript, using all of the methodologies currently available to the historian of illuminated manuscripts. Only recently has it been generally accepted that the miniature, long considered a minor art form, is in fact one of the major arts. Again, only in recent years have we learnt that the necessary proximity of text and illustration frequently has the beneficial effect of forcing the artist to find pictorial and iconographic solutions of striking originality. We are now able to recognize the seamless union of text and

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#### Facing page

Prayer for New Year’s Day (Rosh Hashanah). View of the Interior of a Synagogue. Decorative Motifs, 132v. Miscellanea Rothschild.

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

#### Following pages

Right: Job and His Children, 64v.

Left: The Wealth of Job, 65r.

Miscellanea Rothschild.

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

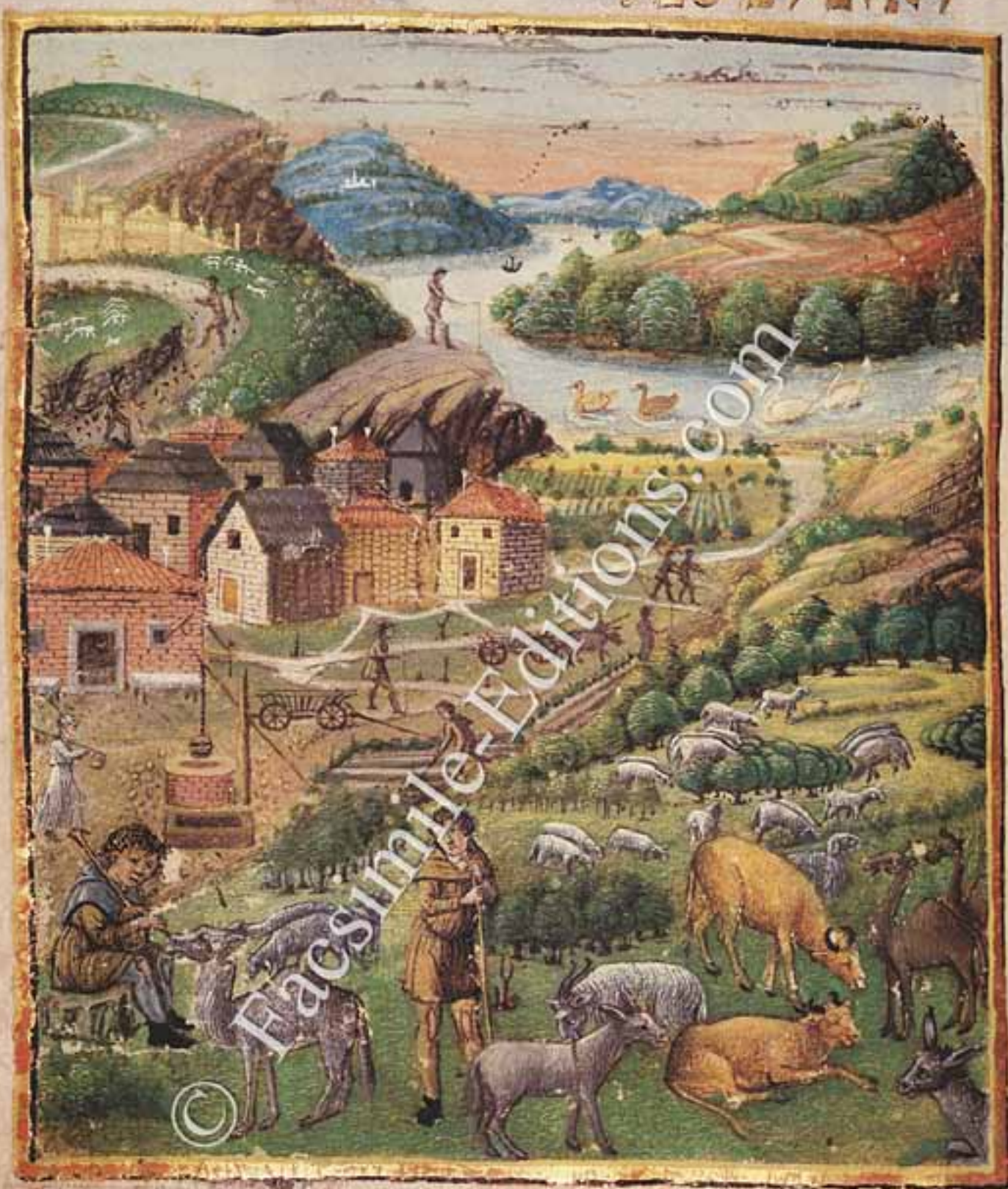




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Handwritten text in a medieval script, likely Hebrew, located below the illustration. The text is partially obscured by a watermark and is difficult to read.



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# The wandering codex

painting, thus focusing less, for instance, on initial letters or historiated panels, and more on the importance of these elements within the graphic layout of the entire page. In addition, we have a better understanding of the relationship between the artist and the patron, who exercised an unusually close degree of control by suggesting the themes for illustration and by overseeing the iconographic treatment they were given.

Research carried out using archival material and printed documents has provided the art historian with a mass of biographical data on artists and patrons, as well as with the economic and social information that allows a deeper understanding of the artefact, both in itself and in its cultural and historical context. It is frequently possible to come to an understanding of the origin of a manuscript by examining the internal evidence it offers: the handwriting and layout, the colophon, information about previous owners, property transfers, annotations, bindings, inventories of old libraries. This type of research is essential because of the intrinsic mobility of books and manuscripts. A book is designed to circulate, and is subject to wear and tear in precisely the areas that carry information. With the passage of time repairs may have changed its appearance considerably. The book historian needs to be something of a detective, following up every lead in order to verify his theories, and the problem is no different when we come to deal with an illuminated Hebrew manuscript.

It may be useful at this point to clarify the question of Jewish attitudes towards the figurative arts. The stereotypical view still persists that the Jews, in their strict observance of the Second Commandment which prohibits the making of "any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth", produced nothing of their own in this field.

The truth is of course that the Jews, like

the followers of other Mosaic religions, found a way of making a contribution in this area. While rigidly and systematically excluding any form of image worship, they nevertheless embellished their synagogues with paintings and mosaics, sculpted their tombstones and, above all, decorated their manuscripts with exquisite illuminations. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as patrons perhaps even more than as artists, they showed a deep understanding of the artistic taste and stylistic repertoire of the societies in which they lived. This was particularly true in Italy. In Rome at the end of the thirteenth century, in Emilia in the fourteenth century, in Tuscany and Lombardy throughout the fifteenth century, the Jews enthusiastically commissioned superb manuscripts, bringing together scribes and illuminators (almost all of them Christian) from the most prestigious workshops.

Among such collaborative undertakings the *Miscellanea Rothschild* stands out as a supreme achievement. But whereas in the case of practically every other Italian Jewish manuscript it is possible to use the formal methodologies described earlier to come to an understanding of place and date of origin, this simply does not yield results when we consider the masterpiece in the Israel Museum. Try as we might we discover none of the normal sources of information – colophon, deed of transfer, some indication of its having been in the possession of a library – that might furnish information enabling us to trace its history prior to the eighteenth century. All we have is a single name, contained in a blessing – Moshe ben Jecutiel ha Cohen – the commissioner perhaps or the first owner. But even this cannot be relied on. The corresponding Italian form of this name – Mose di Consiglio Sacerdoti – appears nowhere in the mass of available printed documentation relating to the Italian Jews. In 1983 I believed he could be identified as a certain Mose Sacerdoti known as

"Furlano", a citizen of Treviso who was living in Cremona after 1465, owner of one of the principal lending banks in the city. From the substantial volume of published information it seemed that this complex individual combined all of the qualities – wealth, personal links with the cultured circles of Lombard Jewry and with the Sforza dukedom – which would necessarily have characterized the patron of a work of this importance. Today, while not wishing to abandon this theory completely, I do not claim it as definitive. In fact, writing in the *Facsimile Editions* companion volume mentioned above, Professor Schlomo Simonsohn (the leading historian of Lombard Jewry), while emphasizing that whoever commissioned this work must have belonged to the group of bankers of German extraction (Manno of Pavia, the Finzi family of Bologna, Ferrara and Mantua and their business associates) nevertheless preferred to leave his precise identity unresolved. And for now so do I.

All that remains then is to encourage the manuscript to speak for itself, coaxing what information we can out of the wonderfully rich miniatures. If the choice of texts already points clearly to a cultured milieu, the decorative and iconographic elements chosen by the Jewish patron are even more sophisticated. This programme of illustration must certainly have been realized with the collaboration of the scribe or scribes entrusted with copying the texts. Their names are unknown to us, but they were beyond question skilful and eloquent representatives of a tradition of Italian Jewish calligraphers who were fully aware of the artistic value of their work, and had learned as early as the thirteenth century to endow the page with a characteristic graphic dignity. Passages

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Facing page  
Esther Gathers the Community. The Hanging of  
Haman, 165v.  
*Miscellanea Rothschild*.  
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.







# The wandering codex

of text and commentary are carefully balanced; the scribe shows consummate skill in drawing on his repertoire of different types of lettering, all of which are perfectly regular and uniform, written in coloured inks. Leading initials, headings and marginal annotations are used to interrupt the otherwise monotonous uniformity of the page design. The large initial letters – line-drawn in gold and coloured inks, sometimes directly on to the parchment, sometimes traced against a ground of entwining tendrils or splendidly framed by decorative panels – are conceived as part of a decorative schema that offers scope to the calligrapher for endless subtle variations.

In the textual decoration we see the first signs of real collaboration between scribe and miniaturist: the subdivisions of the psalms for example are indicated by tiny motifs worked in different colours around the lettering – entwined branches ending in fleur-de-lys, vegetal scroll-work, birds and flowers add an exuberant delight to the elegance of the calligraphy. The same motifs in even more complex form are woven around the opening words of each section of the ritual and of the passages of philosophy, enhanced this time by animal images: rabbits, stags, dogs, hares, cheetahs, monkeys, parrots, doves, peacocks and even human figures – elegant young men. Many of these elements derive from the cultural tradition, strongly infused with elements of International Gothic, that prevailed in Lombard painting and manuscript illumination in the first half of the fifteenth century, surviving as late as 1480 in the work of Bonifacio Bembo and his followers.

Elsewhere, letters are painted in gold of on framed panels against a blue and magenta background, enlivened with High Renaissance motifs of flowers in varying colours and elaborate wreaths in gold.

Major subdivisions of the codex are embellished with a variety of decorative techniques – allegorical and symbolic interpretations of the text as well as

direct illustration, as seen in the miniature of David the Psalmist at the beginning of the psalms. Elsewhere these illustrations are enlarged and compositions of extraordinary refinement fill the entire page. The most important section as far as the miniaturist's work is concerned is the Mahzor, the year-long prayer ritual. The Hebrew liturgy differs profoundly from that of the Christian tradition. Alongside formulas of praise to the Almighty are passages inspired by the Bible, edifying poems and appropriate blessings for every aspect of daily life. Prayers to be used on the occasion of holidays naturally assume particular importance: Shabbat (Sabbath), Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost), Rosh Hashanah (New Year), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Sukkoth (Feast of Tabernacles), Hanukkah (Festival of Lights) and Purim (Feast of Lots). Each of these holidays is illustrated in detail in the Miscellanea Rothschild. In a series of delicate illustrations chronicling the intimacy of home life as well as formal synagogue ritual, every aspect of Jewish experience is represented. We see the Jew at prayer, his head covered with the tallith (prayer scarf), a book open on the lectern; we see him as he stands at the nuptial table and hears the greeting to the newly-wed couple ("joy and happiness"), while, just below, we see him mourning the dead. The patron who commissioned this work, himself Jewish, must certainly have given the artist a detailed account of the scenes he wanted to be illustrated. The preparation of unleavened bread along with every other aspect of the Passover meal, the new moon blessing for the beginning of the month, the benediction at the start of a journey, marriage and circumcision are all included, painted directly on to the parchment, with a simplicity and clarity that seem to indicate some didactic intention. In a rarefied atmosphere the same few characters, with the same expressionless faces, carry out the ritual gestures in absolute silence, their heads covered as

Jewish tradition requires. The common denominator in all these scenes is a close attention to reality, a love of detail, a capacity to imbue the simplest activities of everyday life with a quiet poetry – qualities found in much miniature painting of the period throughout the Po Valley. The most striking parallels, however, are to be found in codices of Lombard origin: in the calendrical tables of the Sforza manuscript *De Sphaera* now in the Biblioteca Estense of Modena, Cristoforo De Predis demonstrates an equally felicitous touch in his illustrations of scenes from everyday life.

The Miscellanea Rothschild is not the only Hebrew manuscript to belong to this group. There is, for instance, a fine example of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* – unfortunately fragmentary and now divided between the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana and an American private collection – that clearly belongs to the same cultural tradition and is also the work of an artist in the De Predis circle.

Apart from these simple illustrative scenes, other forms of decoration are also used in the section of the text containing the Hebrew ritual. Certain passages from the Haggadah, the text read during the Passover supper, have given rise to marginal illustrations that are fully conceived paintings. The artist – who was also responsible for the full page illustrations – here elegantly adapts schemata from contemporary Christian manuscripts in order to interpret episodes such as the battles of Deborah and Sisera, of Sihon and Og, Jacob wrestling with the angel, the destruction of Sodom, Jacob offering bread to the messengers of God, Daniel in the lion's den, Esther calling on the Jewish people, Haman on the gallows. A comparison between the Miscellanea Rothschild version of Haman's

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Facing page  
Wedding Feast and Scene of Mourning, 121v.  
Miscellanea Rothschild.  
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.







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execution and the suicide of Judas in the *Leggendario* of the Biblioteca Reale of Turin (Ms Varia 124) offers a particularly clear example of this process of schematic borrowing from Christian iconography.

The Turin manuscript was also commissioned by the Sforza family, illuminated in 1476 by the same Cristoforo De Predis, whose work offers many other close similarities to the *Miscellanea*. Much of the detail in the figure painting and the sense of space created in landscape passages, for instance, are reminiscent of the frontispiece of the *Antiphonary* of the Madonna del Monte (today in the *Sacro Monte* of Varese), another work signed by De Predis in 1476.

The series of illustrations accompanying the group of Aesopic fables in the *Miscellanea* deserves our special attention, constituting as it does an unequalled example of the illuminator's art placed at the service of a profane subject. The *Mashal ha-Qadmoni* (Parable of the Oriental) is a collection of stories whose author, Isaac Ibn Sahula, a Spanish Jew of the late thirteenth century, was associated with the cabalist circles grouped around Mose de Leon. Superficially it gives the impression of a book written for children, but in reality it is a multi-layered text offering on one level – like the moral fables so popular throughout the Christian world – a mass of detailed precepts and instruction on various aspects of life, while on another apparently suggesting an escape from the moral dimension by the introduction of erotic, at times obscene, episodes. The text is essentially a vehicle for the illustration, and the author himself provided the programmatic captions used by artists working on this theme in numerous fifteenth century manuscripts and in the rare *Soncino incunabulum* (Brescia, 1481).

This series of stories is followed by the "Prince and Hermit"; this too is a moralizing text very similar to the "Legend of Barlaam and Josaphat", popular in Lombardy during the second

half of the fifteenth century; one sign of this popularity is the splendid illuminated manuscript in the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense in Milan. The codex is further enriched by other narratives of the same type.

Each of these stories and legends is ornamented by one or more scenes, in which we see animals talking together or fighting among themselves, pastoral scenes, cultured men and women in the most varied poses, scholars and scribes at their desks. Once again the artist or artists, while faithfully following the indications of the story, have made use of images from other contexts. Once more, we find exact correspondences with the work of Cristoforo De Predis: in the *Leggendario* of Turin two pages, perhaps executed by one of his assistants, are ornamented with animals whose poses are identical to those of animals in the initial pages of the Hebrew fables.

In its almost one thousand pages, the *Miscellanea Rothschild* offers by turns allegory, documentation, legend and religious ritual, emerging as the triumphant result of the collaborative work of many different artists. Anyone not familiar with the way of life of the Jewish community in Italy in the fifteenth century may well be astonished by the apparent ability on the part of Christian artists to understand the Hebrew text, considering that they certainly had no knowledge of Hebrew. Widespread documentary evidence shows, however, that Jews living in Tuscany and Lombardy spoke fluent Italian and Latin, and the miniaturist's work was undoubtedly charted step by step by its patron as well as by the Hebrew scholars working alongside him.

My own strong feeling that the *Miscellanea Rothschild* was originally composed in Lombardy derives, as I have shown, from its close affinities to the work of Bonifacio Bembo and Cristoforo De Predis, as well as of a number of other Lombard artists not cited here. And I would narrow down the time of its composition to the 1470s

when, for a few brief years, Visconti, Sforza and Gonzaga influence made possible the fruitful cohabitation of Christians and Jews. This interaction brought benefits not only in the financial and commercial arena, but equally in the pages of this incomparable book, which still speaks to us of a life of tranquillity in a society marked by an exceptional moral and cultural openness.

Luisa Mortara Ottolenghi

(Translated from the Italian by Jill Tilden)

Luisa Mortara Ottolenghi has taught Codicology and History of the Miniature at the University of Milan. For more than twenty years she has been carrying out research on illuminated Hebrew manuscripts and has published numerous articles and catalogues. She is President of the Centre of Contemporary Hebrew Documentation in Milan.

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In production: the facsimile edition of the *Miscellanea* and the "Companion Volume": The Rothschild Miscellanea. Facsimile Editions (tel. 0044-1-286-0071, 40 Hamilton Terrace, London NW8 9UJ) in association with The Israel Museum, 1988.

Facing page  
Ornamental Initial with a Dance Scene, 246v.  
*Miscellanea Rothschild*.  
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Following pages  
Right: Preparation of the House and of the Dishes for Passover, 55v.

Left: Beginning of the Passover Supper, 56r.  
*Miscellanea Rothschild*.  
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.











הַלְבוֹתֵי חֶמֶץ וְחֵמָה  
כִּי הָיוּ בְּעֵינֵינוּ

פירק ויחסידי פארוואסל פאר  
בשם דערמאנט אלס  
נאכא נאך סוף יום ווארדענעם  
בזונד חייב פאר נאך פאר איר

הענין שיהיה שם פסח והוא

קדוש יחזק כספ יחזק יצחק יחזק ויחזק ויחזק ויחזק  
וירד מן שמים עקב טרף מן ויחזק ויחזק ויחזק

<sup>יחזק</sup> חזש נטילה כפס יבנע  
זה חזר טוק  
<sup>היה</sup> היה לחזור נטילה החזר  
דקר יהנה חזק

חשוקי חוגזו לו כס חשוקי  
חשוקי חוגזו לו כס חשוקי



הז תבנית עובדת צריך שיהיו לרחוקים עד שהיה ודאי להם וזה יסוד  
לחן והמורה כוללת כל אחד ואחד ויחיד ולשון קצתם יחיד

על המצב הבית יסרו גם הקצרה ובה תג דעתת רחוקותה

והנהגות השלישית ויחזקה שיש לה ב' סיועם ישים עליה וזה  
וזה הענין שיש לה רק סיועו וזה הענין


הוא נקרא "חברת החלוקה" והוא חייב שיהיה לו שם  
הוא חייב שיהיה לו שם חלוקה

הנה כי עם חמשת גם יסמו לפני דעם חודש על

והוא הענין כי יושב הנהיג מוסדות ונהגיל בזה

וזה טעם הקדוש  
שם יצחק תחלה

(12)



A blank, aged, cream-colored page, likely an endpaper or flyleaf of a book. The paper has a slightly textured appearance with some minor creases and discoloration, characteristic of old paper. There is no text or other markings on the page.

सप्तमः



והוא הנקרא סוס ליוסף והנחבב סוסות  
 ותה נוסח הקדוש

~~שבת יומה תחלה~~



This image shows a blank, aged, cream-colored page, likely an endpaper or flyleaf of a book. The paper has a slightly textured appearance with some faint smudges and discoloration, characteristic of old paper. The left edge of the page shows the binding of the book.

सुखदुःखसंज्ञायाः





# The wandering codex

## Wise foxes and foolish fishes

The Jewish animal tales that we offer below are an example of the kind of fable that was included in the *Miscellanea Rothschild*. While the Jews were not innovators in this field, they skillfully adapted the fables of India and Greece to their own purposes. The foxes, for example, can be amusingly Talmudical—they argue like expert casuists, quote Scripture with the ease of learned rabbis, and their humor and irony have a characteristic Jewish flavor.

### The Fate of the Wicked (A fable by Rabbi Meir)

Once a fox said to a wolf, “If you want to enjoy a good meal, take my advice: enter the courtyard of any Jew on Friday and help him in his preparations for the Sabbath. Rest assured that he will reward you for this by asking you to partake of the Sabbath feast.”

The wolf was enchanted with the sage advice of the fox and decided to follow it immediately.

But no sooner did he show his face in the courtyard of a Jew than the entire household fell upon him with sticks and trounced him so soundly that he barely managed to escape with his life.

Full of wrath the wolf went in search of the fox, and when he found him he wanted to tear him limb from limb. The fox tried to mollify him.

“Don’t carry on so,” he told him. “I’m not to blame because they beat you. Blame your father instead! Pay attention to what I’m going to tell you now.”

“Once a Jew asked your father to help him in his preparations for the Sabbath, and for that he promised to invite him to the feast. But your father had no patience and devoured all the delicious courses and did not leave the Jew even one little chicken bone.

“Now, can you understand why the Jew beat you? But don’t lose heart! Leave it to me. I’ll lead you to a house where both of us can have our fill of a delicious feast.”

The wolf gratefully agreed.

The fox then led the wolf to a well



over which hung two buckets suspended from ropes. When one bucket went down the other one came up. The fox climbed into one bucket and quickly descended to the bottom of the well.

“What are you doing there?” asked the curious wolf from above.

“My! You’ve never seen anything like it!” the fox cried out with rapture.

“I’ve found here meat and cheese and other good things to eat! Just look down – don’t you see what a great big cheese is down here?”

The wolf looked down and, sure enough, saw the reflection of the moon mirrored in the water. But he believed that it was a cheese as the fox had told him.

His appetite whetted, the wolf could hardly control himself any longer.

“How can I get down?” he called to the fox.

“Very simply,” said the fox, “get into the other bucket and join me.”

The wolf climbed into the bucket with alacrity. But no sooner was he in than the weight of his body pulled him down to the bottom of the well, and at the same time pulled up the other bucket carrying the fox, who jumped nimbly out.

Terror seized the wolf when he saw what had happened.

“How will I get up again?” he cried to the fox.

The fox merely answered him with the saying from the Book of Proverbs: “The righteous is delivered out of trouble.

And the wicked cometh in his stead.”

(Adapted from the Haggadah of the Talmud.)

### The Advantage of Being a Scholar

A fox looked up into a tree and saw a crow sitting on the topmost branch. The crow looked mighty good to him, for he was hungry. He tried every wile to get him down but the wise old crow only leered contemptuously down at him.

“Foolish crow!” the fox said, banteringly. “Believe me, you have no reason to be afraid of me. Haven’t you heard the Messiah is coming! If you were a Talmud scholar like me you’d surely know that the Prophet Isaiah has said that when the Messiah comes ‘the lion shall lie down with the lamb and the fox with the crow and there shall be peace forevermore.’”

And as he stood thus speaking sweetly, the baying of hounds was heard. The fox began to tremble with fright and started to run for his life.

“Foolish fox,” croaked the crow pleasantly from the tree. “You have no reason to be afraid since you’re a Talmud scholar and know what the Prophet Isaiah has said.”

“True, I know what the Prophet Isaiah said,” cried the fox as he slunk into the bushes, “but you see the trouble is the dogs don’t!”

This page

St. Martin Divides His Cloak. The Virgin of the Annunciation.

Ambrosian Antiphony of the Madonna del Monte, 1r. 1476, 570 x 410 mm (22 1/4 x 16 in.). Sacro Monte, Varese.

Facing page

The Master and His Students, 2v.

Mishneh Torah of Maimonides, Manuscript Rossiano 498, c. 1470, 227 x 177 mm (9 x 7 in.).

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City.

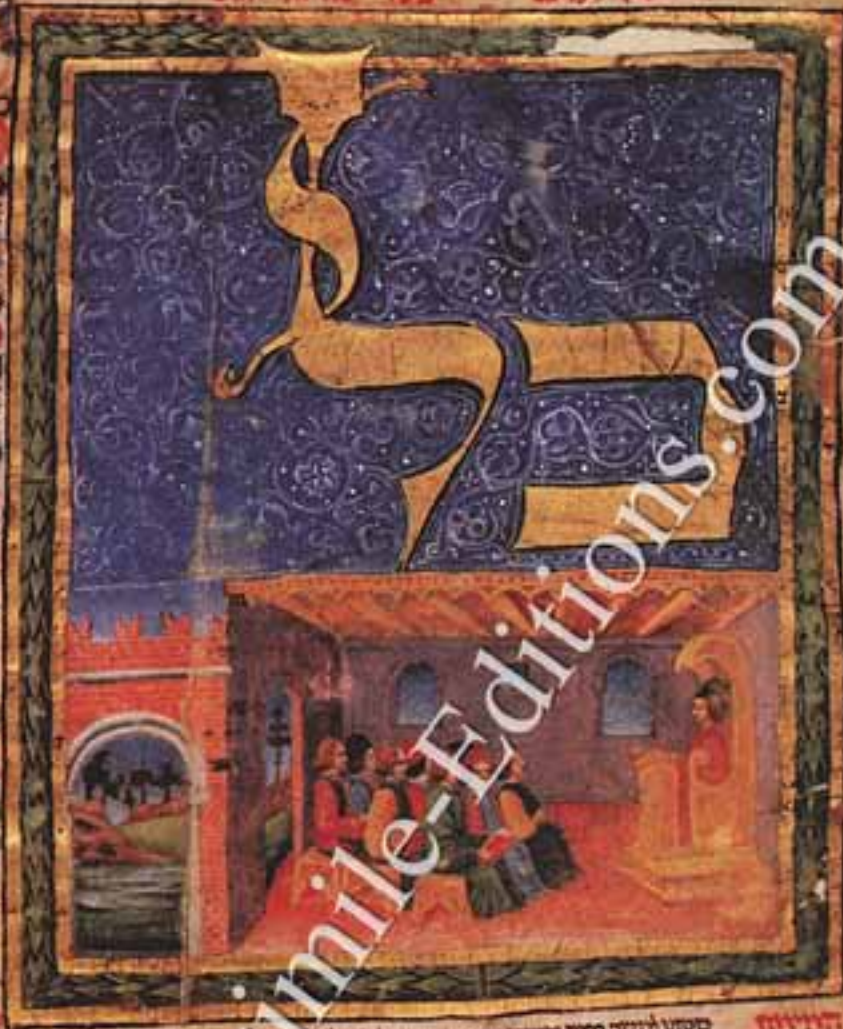


החיות אשר קצ

יחיה יולי כד הילי ופעל די תענה

בסדר יסודי תחילתה

יהי חסדך לתמונ



החיות אשר קצ  
יחיה יולי כד הילי ופעל די תענה  
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# The wandering codex

## The Fox and the Foolish Fishes

*The Holy One said to the Angel of Death: "Cast a pair of each species into the sea, and then thou shalt have dominion over all that remain of the species."*

*The Angel did so forthwith, and he cast a pair of each kind into the sea. When the fox saw what he was about, what did he do? At once he stood and wept. Then said the Angel of Death unto him: "Why weepest thou?"*

*"For my companions, whom thou hast cast into the sea," answered the fox. "Where, then, are thy companions?" said the Angel.*

*The fox ran to the sea-shore, and the Angel of Death beheld the reflection of the fox in the water, and he thought that he had already cast in a pair of foxes, so, addressing the fox by his side, he cried: "Be off with you!"*

*The fox at once fled and escaped. The weasel met him, and the fox related what had happened, and what he had done. And so the weasel went and did likewise.*

*At the end of the year, the Leviathan assembled all the creatures in the sea, and lo! the fox and the weasel were missing, for they had not come into the sea. He sent to ask, and he was told how the fox and the weasel had escaped through their wisdom. They taunted the Leviathan, saying: "The fox is exceedingly cunning."*

*The Leviathan felt uneasy and envious, and he sent a deputation of great fishes, with the order that they were to deceive the fox, and bring him before him.*

*They went, and found him by the sea-shore. When the fox saw the fishes disporting themselves near the bank, he was surprised, and he went among them. They beheld him, and asked: "Who art thou?"*

*"I am the fox," said he.*

*"Knowest thou not," continued the fishes, "that a great honor is in store for thee, and that we have*

*come here on thy behalf?"*

*"What is it?" asked the fox.*

*"The Leviathan," they said, "is sick and likely to die. He has appointed thee to reign in his stead, for he has heard that thou art wiser and more prudent than all other animals. Come with us, for we are his messengers, and are here in thy honor."*

*"But," objected the fox, "how can I come into the sea without being drowned?"*

*"Nay," said the fishes, "ride upon one of us, and he will carry thee above the sea, so that not even a drop of water shall touch so much as the soles of thy feet, until thou reachest the kingdom. We will take thee down without thy knowing it. Come with us and reign over us, and be king, and be joyful all thy days. No more wilt thou need to seek for food, nor will wild beasts, stronger than thou, devour thee."*

*The fox heard and believed their words. He rode upon one of them, and they went with him into the sea. Soon, however, the waves dashed over him, and he began to perceive that he had been tricked.*

*"Woe is me!" wailed the fox. "What have I done? I have played many a trick on others, but these fishes have played one on me worth all mine put together. Now that I have fallen into their hands, how shall I free myself? Indeed," he said, turning to the fishes, "now that I am fully in your power, I shall speak the truth. What are you going to do with me?"*

*"To tell thee the truth," replied the fishes, "the Leviathan has heard thy fame, that thou art very wise, and he said, I will rend the fox and will eat his heart, and thus I shall become wise."*

*"Oh!" said the fox. "Why did you not tell me the truth at first? I should then have brought my heart with me, and given it to King Leviathan, and he would have honored me; but now ye are in an evil plight."*

*"What! Thou hast not thy heart with thee?"*

*"Certainly not. It is our custom to leave our heart at home while we go about from place to place. When we need our heart, we take it; otherwise it remains at home."*

*"What must we do?" asked the bewildered fishes.*

*"My house and dwelling-place," replied the fox, "are by the sea-shore. If you like, carry me back to the place whence you brought me, I will fetch my heart, and will come again with you. I will present my heart to the Leviathan, and he will reward me and you with honors. But if you take me thus, without my heart, he will be wroth with you, and will devour you. I have no fear for myself, for I shall say unto him: 'My lord, they did not tell me at first, and when they did tell me, I begged them to return for my heart, but they refused.'"*

*The fishes at once declared that he was speaking well. They conveyed him back to the spot on the sea-shore whence they had taken him.*

*Off jumped the fox, and he danced with joy.*

*"Be quick," cried the fishes, "get thy heart, and come."*

*But the fox answered: "You fools! Begone! How could I have come with you without my heart? Have you any animals that go about without their hearts?"*

*"Thou hast tricked us!" they moaned.*

*"Fools! I tricked the Angel of Death, how much more easily a parcel of silly fishes."*

*The fishes returned in shame, and related to their master what had happened.*

*"In truth," he said, "the fox is cunning, and ye are simple.*

*Concerning you was it said: 'The turning away of the simple shall slay them.'" (Prov. 1:32)*

*Then the Leviathan ate the fishes.*

*(From the Alphabet of Pseudo-Ben Sira, seventh-eighth century A.D.)*