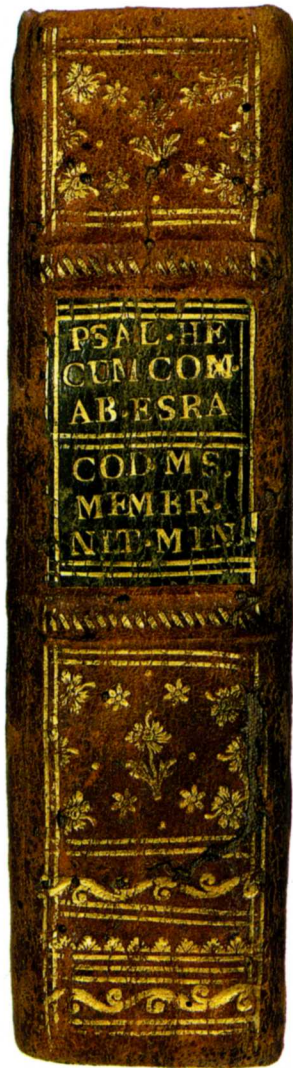


PSALMS WITH COMMENTARY

A THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ILLUMINATED  
HEBREW BOOK OF PSALMS WITH A COMMENTARY  
BY ABRAHAM IBN EZRA





*Psalm 126* 'When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion, We were like unto them that dream.'  
*Psalm 125* 'They that trust in the Lord Are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, So the Lord is round about His people, From this time forth and for ever.'



*Psalm 29* (Recited every Sabbath morning in the synagogue.) 'The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve ... The Lord will give strength unto His people; The Lord will bless His people with peace.'  
*Psalm 33* 'Give thanks unto the Lord with harp, Sing praises unto Him with the saltery of ten strings. Sing unto Him a new song; Play skilfully amid shouts of joy.'







*Psalm 62* 'Only for God doth my soul wait in stillness; From Him cometh my salvation, ... How long will ye set upon a man, That ye may slay him, all of you ...' *Psalm 61* 'Hear my cry, O God; Attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I call unto Thee, when my heart fainteth; ... I will take refuge in the covert of Thy wings.'



*Psalm 34* Of David, when he changed his demeanour before Abimelech who drove him away, and he departed. 'I will bless the Lord at all times;' *Psalm 48* 'Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised, In the city of our God, His holy mountain, Fair in situation, the joy of the whole earth; Even Mount Zion, the uttermost parts of the north, The city of the great King.'



The Psalms are loved by Jews more than any other book of the Bible apart from the Torah: every ceremony includes at least one of its 150 chapters and many other prayers are virtually mosaics of psalmic verses, reassembled out of familiar phrases. A detailed knowledge of this book could be assumed by traditional Jewish writers, because it has been customary for centuries to recite all 150 psalms cyclicly each week: every page of the present manuscript bears a headline indicating on which weekday it is to be read. The popularity of Psalms is easy to explain. It comprises a rich assortment of hymns, laments and didactic poems written in a compact and striking style, at times mysterious and obscure, in which ideas are developed through double or triple arrangements of lines in a manner characteristic of biblical poetry. Its personal and urgent tone made it a natural complement to the Pentateuch. One midrash makes this feeling explicit: 'Moses gave the five books of the Torah to Israel, while David gave them the Psalms, with its five books'.



Of all medieval Hebrew manuscript psalters, one of the earliest and most important to survive is the masterpiece Ms. Parm. 1870 (Cod. De Rossi 510), the treasure of the Palatina Library in Parma, Italy. This profusely illuminated book of Psalms was written and decorated in about 1280, probably in Emilia in Northern Italy. Its 452 pages contain the biblical text in a clear, large vocalized Hebrew hand. Each chapter is illuminated and numbered, and many are exquisitely illustrated with musical instruments or with scenes described in the text – extraordinary for a Hebrew manuscript of the period, and proof that it was the work of Jews. Only a wealthy patron could have commissioned so lavish and tasteful a manuscript; and the presence of Ibn Ezra's commentary suggests that he was also well educated. Early copies of Abraham ibn Ezra's great commentary on Psalms are rare, and the one in this manuscript records many wordings not to be found in other versions. A joy to hold, this facsimile will serve as a constant reminder of the rich legacy of medieval Jewish scholarship and artistic patronage.

manuscript is one of the great treasures of early Hebrew manuscript illumination. The Palatina Library in Parma, Italy, which holds close to 1650 Hebrew manuscripts, is one of the world's greatest collections. Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi, a Christian Hebraist, whose collection is now housed in the Palatina, built up one of the richest libraries of Hebrew manuscripts and printed books ever in private hands.

The fivefold subdivision – marked by doxologies at the ends of psalms 41, 72, 89 and 106 – may indeed be related to an ancient but now lapsed practice of reading psalms in conjunction with the weekly readings from the Pentateuch. The 150 psalms probably correspond to the 150 readings into which the Pentateuch was divided and originally read over a three-year cycle, a custom that died out in the Middle Ages. The illustrations in this manuscript are particularly valuable for musicologists and art historians of the Middle Ages: depictions of contemporary musical instruments are extremely rare, and the present volume contains many. This sumptuous manuscript comprises 226 folios (452 pages), 13.5 x 10 cm (5 1/2 x 4 ins) contained in 23 quires. One 16-page quire, added at a later date, contains the ceremonies for engagements, marriages, circumcisions and funerals, as well as for the end of a Sabbath followed by a Festival, times at which Psalms were especially recited. The rich decorations are characterized by the delicate use of harmonious colours; gold is used liberally but with sensitivity, the illuminator carefully balancing the Psalms and commentary with the images in the margin. This





Abraham ibn Ezra married, according to legend, the daughter of another great poet, Judah Halevi, and had five sons. Only one of them, Isaac, is believed to have survived an epidemic that killed his entire family, yet Isaac seems later to have deserted Judaism for Islam, and Abraham ibn Ezra, then in his fifties, did penance by becoming a wandering scholar. His journeying took him to Rome, Lucca, Pisa, Mantua, Béziers, Narbonne, Bordeaux, Angers, Rouen and London, as well as Spain and North Africa. The rabbis of Jewish communities he visited in France in 1147 described how he 'opened their eyes' with his wisdom. His commentary on the book of Psalms displays some of the qualities they so admired: his fine feeling for complex language, his independent intellect and deep insight into human nature. De Rossi believed this manuscript was completed in Rhodes in August-September 1156, but this is in fact the date on which Ibn Ezra completed his commentary on Psalms of which this is a copy. As to the location, **it seems that Ibn Ezra wrote his commentary in Rouen in Northern**

**France.** Since this was called in Latin 'Rodamagum', which Hebrew scribes shortened to 'Rodez', it was easy for a misunderstanding to arise. The attribution of the book of Psalms to King David – who conquered Jerusalem for his people – is based not only on his reputation as a 'sweet singer of Israel' (2 *Sam.* 23:1), but on the recognition that no fewer than 73 include his name. The fact that others bear different attributions has been accounted for in different ways. **Ibn Ezra handles the question of authorship with characteristic balance and intelligence.** The commentaries of Ibn Ezra enjoyed great popularity from the start, and are still admired, especially by advanced students, not only for their encyclopedic character and terse and enigmatic style, but for their critical, thought-provoking spirit as well as their wit. Numerous super-commentaries were written on his glosses, **making his work a vital link in the long chain of Jewish Bible commentary.**



Abraham ibn Ezra, born in 1089 in Tudela, Spain, was a master of several branches of medieval learning – mathematics, astronomy, grammar and philosophy, as well as the exposition of biblical texts.

**H**e combined far-reaching rationalism with a firm belief in astrology in a way that may seem surprising to a modern mind, yet this was not unusual at that time. **H**e was poor for much of his life and travelled widely, but was able to face ill-fortune with equanimity and even humour. **H**is opponents were not spared his savage wit, which was rich even for a Spanish Jewish poet. **A**ll this must be seen against a background of genuine religious humility, which emerges in his finest works of poetry and prose. **A**braham ibn Ezra left a large body of writings – he is said to have written no fewer than 108 different books, not all of which have survived or been published. **H**is highly influential thought and literary creativity did much to spread the science and spirituality of Spanish Jewry far beyond the regions in which it originated. **A**ged seventy-five and feeling his death approaching, he punned on a scriptural verse: 'And Abraham was seventy-five years old when he departed from the 'anger of God'. **T**he Bible actually states, וַיֵּצֵא אֱבְרָהָם מֵהָרָר *Genesis* 12:4, that he left the city of 'Haran', but Ibn Ezra could not resist jesting on its similarity to *haron*, 'anger' or 'fury'. **T**hroughout history, Abraham Ibn Ezra has been respected as one of Judaism's greatest sages.





*Psalm 84* 'I had rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God, Than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.' *Psalm 127* 'Except the Lord build the house, They labour in vain that build it...'



*Psalm 83* 'O God, keep not Thou silence; Hold not Thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, Thine enemies are in an uproar; And they that hate Thee have lifted up the head.' *Psalm 30* 'I will extol Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast raised me up.'



*Psalm 59* When Saul sent men to kill David they watched his house. 'Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God...' *Psalm 121* 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains: From whence shall my help come?'





*Psalm 76* With string-music.  
 'In Judah is God known;  
 His name is great in Israel.'  
*Psalm 132* 'I will not give  
 sleep to mine eyes, Nor  
 slumber to mine eyelids;  
 Until I find out a place for  
 the Lord.' (A king, with his  
 left hand on his eyelid, and  
 his right hand on the open  
 page of a book containing  
 the first two commandments  
 in Hebrew.)



*Psalm 81* 'Sing aloud unto  
 God our strength; Shout  
 unto the God of Jacob.  
 Take up the melody, and  
 sound the timbrel, The  
 sweet harp with the  
 psaltery. Blow the horn at  
 the new moon, At the full  
 moon for our feast-day.'  
*Psalm 67* 'God be gracious  
 unto us, and bless us; May  
 He cause His face to shine  
 toward us ... O let the  
 nations be glad and sing  
 for joy ...'



*Psalm 149* 'Sing unto the  
 Lord a new song.' (A  
 choirleader directs five  
 choristers before whom  
 there is an open book with  
 notes and the words *Ein  
 kamokha*. 'There is none like  
 unto Thee among the gods,  
 O Lord'; a verse sung  
 before the reading of the  
 Torah on Sabbath morn-  
 ings, from *Psalm 86: 8*.)  
*Psalm 137* 'By the rivers of  
 Babylon, There we sat  
 down, yea, we wept, When  
 we remembered Zion.'



Ibn Ezra's seminal commentary on Psalms has never been translated in its entirety, so the present study will enable scholars and lay readers alike to appreciate its sophistication. Emmanuel Silver provides a scholarly survey of Ibn Ezra's life and works, including translations of some of the more important Psalm commentaries. **Most of the facts of Ibn Ezra's life are so shrouded in mystery that he has become the subject of numerous legends, some of them the purest works of fantasy.** Emmanuel Silver clears the ground by outlining some of the salient facts, including the evidence for his death in London, and relating Ibn Ezra's ideas to the schools of thought of his time. Aspects of his complex personality emerge through scattered remarks in his works, and particularly in his poetry, some of which has a distinctive ring of courageous detachment. The companion volume not only outlines the place of Psalms and of Ibn Ezra's highly original contribution to its understanding in Jewish life, but describes the world from which this particular manuscript came. **The Jews of**



Scholarship has always been an important aspect of the work undertaken by Facsimile Editions: great care is taken to commission leading scholars to examine each manuscript, frequently revealing fascinating new information. **E**ach companion volume is exquisitely printed and bound to match the facsimile. **T**hat of the *Parma Psalter* will contain substantial extracts from Ibn Ezra's commentary, some of which have never before been translated. **E**mmanuel Silver, formerly of the British Library, has spent many years examining this important text of Ibn Ezra's and will comment at length on the passages he translates. **M**alachi Beit-Arié, Ludwig Jesselson Professor of Codicology and Palaeography at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem will investigate the codicology of the manuscript; **T**hérèse Metzger, art historian, will discuss the iconography and illumination; and **N**ice Ugolotti, Curator of Hebrew Manuscripts at the Palatina Library, will describe the De Rossi collection in Parma. **D**e Rossi compiled and published a catalogue of his library in 1803, but within a few years, in 1816, had sold it to Napoleon's wife, Marie-Louise, Duchess of Parma, for 100,000 francs. **I**t was she who presented it to the Palatina Library where it still is. **T**he companion volume, edited by Jeremy Schonfield, will contain information that has never previously been available. **I**t will provide non-specialists too with a unique introduction to the world of medieval Jewish thought and art.

**Italy during the thirteenth century faced violent onslaughts on their faith and lives.** The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 attempted to reduce them to serfdom, and introduced the compulsory wearing of a distinctive badge; while the 'trial' and burning of the Talmud that took place in Paris in 1240 also had repercussions in Italy. By 1278 their position was in general exacerbated by the transfer of the South of Italy to Angevin rulers in 1265 under the direct influence of the Popes. **It was there that most Italian Jews lived - some 12,000 - 15,000.** Following a blood-libel in Trani, a violent crusade was launched to convert them, and by 1294 perhaps half had succumbed, others being forced to flee or to practise their faith in secret. **It was in the late thirteenth century that this exquisite book was commissioned and made.**

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**FACSIMILE EDITIONS** was founded in London in 1980 by Michael and Linda Falter in order to reproduce some of the world's finest illuminated manuscripts. Together with their printer, papermaker, colour separator, gilder, binder and silversmith they have developed techniques for reproducing the feel and character of original manuscripts, and have earned themselves a unique reputation for excellence. They are proud to count among their subscribers many of the world's major libraries and discerning collectors. They work only with craftsmen who are prepared to collaborate in their quest for the highest quality. **Extent** 452 pages, size 13.5 x 10 cm (5½ x 4 ins).

**Paper** Several years of research have culminated in the production of a paper that exactly simulates the opacity, texture and thickness of the vellum on which this manuscript was written. It was made in the small Alpine paper mill that was responsible for the papers used in the facsimiles of the *Kennicott Bible*, *Rothschild Miscellany*, *Barcelona Haggadah*, *Biblia de Alba* and *Me'ah Berakhot*, which have been widely acclaimed as the closest likenesses to vellum achieved. The uncoated neutral pH paper used here has been developed exclusively for this facsimile.

**Photography** The manuscript was painstakingly disbound and each bi-folio leaf carefully 'relaxed' by a conservator, so that it would lie flat for the photographer.

**Colour Separation** The colour separators combined laser-scanning equipment with precise hand work in making the colour separations necessary for the first proofs. These were then compared with the original manuscript in Parma by the separator, the publisher and the printer, and corrections made. Up to four proofs were prepared for each page to ensure that an exact likeness was achieved.

**Printing** The facsimile was printed by offset lithography in up to ten colours. Every sheet was printed under the close and critical supervision of the publishers, who stay in Italy for the duration of the printing.

**Gilding** The burnished gold in this manuscript is still in extraordinarily fine condition although it is almost 700 years old; it was reproduced by building up the surface below the gold prior to applying the metal foil individually to each page.

**Cutting** Each page was cut

to the exact size and shape of the original. It was aged and then gilded at the edges with 23 carat gold. **Binding** The facsimile and companion volume are both bound in the finest vellum, with spines in havana sheepskin. Gold-tooled, and then weathered and aged by hand, the facsimile has a green morocco label on which is stamped the volume's title. The original quire formation of the manuscript has been scrupulously observed. **Gift Certificate** An illuminated certificate to accompany each facsimile can be dedicated to a person or institution by our calligrapher. **Presentation** The facsimile and companion volume are boxed in an elegant slipcase edged in morocco. Edition Strictly limited to 500 numbered and 50 *Ad Personam* copies. Each volume is discretely numbered by hand inside the binding and is accompanied by a numbered certificate carrying the seal of the Palatina Library and the Curators's signature. Once every copy has been bound, the printing plates are destroyed, to protect the significant investment value of each facsimile.



This facsimile is the fruit of many years of effort and research by Michael and Linda Falter, who have established their reputation for being able to replicate exactly the vellum, delicate colours and burnished gold of medieval manuscripts, and for creating some of the finest manuscript reproductions in the world.

**E**ach copy is as close a reproduction of the original as can be achieved. **T**he Falters insisted that this facsimile should not only look but feel like the original, so have had a special paper milled. **T**he manuscript was photographed, after which colour separations were made using the latest digital technology. **T**hese were minutely corrected by an expert hand retoucher before the first of many sets of proofs was prepared. **E**ach proof was checked against the original manuscript in detail, adding colours and correcting where necessary to ensure complete colour fidelity. **T**he publishers supervise the printing, hand binding and gilding personally. **O**nce each book is completed, it is discretely numbered by the Falters before being packed, together with the leather-bound companion volume, in a morocco-edged slipcase.







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glorified thoughts of man in covers of finest morocco precisely tooled in labyrinthine designs. For centuries, this glorification was primarily bestowed upon religious manuscripts, but by the fourteenth century wealthy patrons recognizing that it offered too splendid a medium of expression to permit limitation, employed lay artists to add their talents in increasing the illuminated treasures of the world. By the twentieth century thousands of these manuscripts had succumbed to time, war and accident. Facsimile Editions now strive to bring to light from scattered obscurity those remaining tomes, and to re-create them for the delight and enrichment of our own and future generations.

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