

ICONOGRAPHY AS A SOLUTION: THE ILLUMINATIONS OF THE
ROTHSCHILD PENTATEUCH BOOK OF GENESIS

by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Sarah and Harry Grimberg, for
instilling in me a love for books.

To my husband, Fabián Menalled, whose critical eye and thoughtful insights
enriches my daily journey.

And to my son, Uriel Menalled, for your contagious love of life.

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on iconographic and comparative analyses of the illuminations of the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch (1295-1296), an illuminated Hebrew manuscript produced in Western Europe. The manuscript includes the five books of Moses (Pentateuch)- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy- and supplemental weekly readings with passages from the books of Judges and Prophets, along with philosophical commentary on the biblical text. The manuscript was written in Hebrew and Aramaic Onkelos, and presents a lavish illumination program along with figurative micrography that spans over 1,180 folios and 131 illuminations of initial word panels. The iconographic analysis revealed a relation between the biblical text and image. Four Genesis stories – Creation, Noah, Binding of Issac, and Joseph’s Dreams- were compared with the illuminations of the same accounts of contemporary Hebrew and Latin manuscripts. The illuminations in the Book of Genesis incorporated the Romanesque and Gothic styles and were inspired by the imagery of 13th C bestiaries that cataloged fantastic and real animals with assigned moral-laden values. The images in the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch offered an allegorical interpretation of the biblical text, unlike the illuminations in other contemporary manuscripts that explicitly depicted the narratives. The iconographic and comparative analyses further suggest considerations about the identity of its patron, Joseph Martil ben Joseph, and illuminator (unknown). Its iconography presents innovative ways to depict anthropomorphic narratives through animals and demonstrates the influence of mainstream imagery and historical events in the illumination of the Rothschild Pentateuch.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The use of figurative images in Hebrew manuscripts was controversial due to the biblical prohibition of making a “sculptured image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Exodus 20:4). This ban was later legislated and its scope specified by the rabbis during the 3rd C¹ and 5th C proscribing the use of the human figure.² Yet, figural art was used in Jewish religious objects and settings³ following the commandment of *beautifying* sacred objects as a way to exalt God.⁴ Early on, artistic expressions were rendered through micrography (text written in miniature script arranged in ornamental or figurative motifs), as can be found in the Ben Asher Codex of the Prophets produced in the 9th C Egypt⁵, or through letter ornamentation in sacred books; but from the Middle Age onwards, Hebrew manuscripts of Bibles and other liturgical texts incorporated illustrations. Then, a challenge arose for patrons and scribes, on how to illustrate anthropocentric narratives while observing the biblical concern for graven images. This study claims that the allegorical illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch constitute a solution to this challenge.

In this thesis, a visual allegory refers to a composition of images where each carries a moral value, such that the composition unfolds a symbolic narrative of a text. Visual allegories

¹ The prohibition of. Graven image was written for the first time in Mishnah, the first rabbinic written collection of Jewish laws and traditions, derived from the Pentateuch and oral traditions.

² Later, the interpretation and extent of the prohibition of making images was thoroughly discussed by the Talmudic Rabbis (ca. 450-550), where they stated the prohibition of having accurate images of humans.

³ Rachel Wischnitzer-Bernstein. *Symbols and Forms in Jewish Art*, Irsa, Krakow 2022.

⁴ From the Talmud 3th through 5th centuries.

⁵ Anchi Hoh, <https://blogs.loc.gov/international-collections/2018/02/micrography-in-the-jewish-tradition/>

function at two levels, based on its images' form and meaning. It is in this regard that allegorical iconography constitutes a solution to imagery constraints, as it allows the choice of images' forms compliant with the concern of a graven image, while conveying a moral meaning that could reflect the anthropocentric text. This study focuses on the relation between text and image through the visual allegories of the illuminations of the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch⁶ (1295-1296).

Other terms related to the notion of visual allegory are emblem, motif, and symbol. Emblem refers to an image that represents a group of people or an individual. In this study the word emblem will be utilized when referring to coats of arms or royal signs. Motif refers to a recurring shape or image within or across visual compositions. "Motif" will be used when describing panel backgrounds or elements in stems. Symbol refers to a sign that represents an idea. Words associated with "symbols", such as "symbolic" and "symbolisms" will be used to analyze the compositions of the illuminations.

The Rothschild Pentateuch⁷ is a Hebrew manuscript most likely produced in northeast France or southwest Germany, a region referred to as Ashkenaz. The manuscript includes the five books of Moses (Pentateuch)-Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy- and supplemental weekly readings (*parashot*) with passages from the books of Judges, Kings, and Prophets along with philosophical commentary on the biblical text by Rabbi Schlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105). The biblical text is written in Hebrew and Aramaic Onkelos,⁸ while the philosophical commentary is written in Hebrew. The text is enhanced with cross references to

⁶ The manuscript is named after its latest owner, Baroness Adelaide Rothschild (1853-1935).

⁷ The Rothschild Pentateuch is housed at the Paul J. Getty Museum, Ms. 116 (2018.43).

⁸ Is the Jewish Babylonian Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch, written by the second century.

other sections of the Hebrew Bible rendered in micrography. The manuscript has a lavish illumination program that spans over 1,180 folios including 131 illuminations. The manuscript was written by the scribes Elijah ben Meshulam (main text) and Elijah ben Yehiel (micrography) for the patron Joseph Martil ben Joseph, during the last quarter of the 13th century.

The thirteenth century was a time of cultural crossroads with an intense exchange of people, capital, ideas, and technology between Europe, Northern Africa, and Asia due to war⁹, trade, urbanization,¹⁰ and forced displacement of people¹¹. It was also a time when diverse ethnic groups coexisted in newly formed urban centers and were expected to socially and culturally integrate into the ways of the main society.¹² It is in this regard that 13th century illuminated manuscripts offer a lens for the examination of cultural overlaps. This study argues that the visual allegories of the Rothschild Pentateuch's Book of Genesis function not only as biblical interpretations but also as metaphors for the social and political landscape of 13th C Ashkenaz.

Despite its uniqueness in terms of completeness, a vast illumination program, and exquisite micrography, the Rothschild Pentateuch is, so far, an understudied manuscript. Additionally, the Book of Genesis provides a suitable case study because out of the five books of

⁹ The Crusade wars (1095-1291) were critical for the social, economic, and political transformation processes from the 11th throughout the 13th century. The Crusade wars were supported by the papacy with the purpose to regain the Holy Land from Muslim control. See John Riddle, *A History of the Middle Ages, 300-1500*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008). Lisa Blaydes & C. Paik, "The Impact of Holy Land Crusades on State Formation: War Mobilization, Trade Integration, and Political Development in Medieval Europe," in *International Organization*, 70 no. 3 (2016) 551-86.

¹⁰ Urbanization refers here to the transition from a centrally governed feudal rural system into self-governed urban centers, a process that took place from the 11th C through the 13th C in Europe. See Robert Brenner "The Low Countries in the Transition to Capitalism," in *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 1 no.2 (2001) 169-241.

¹¹ Examples of forced displacement of people include the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290 and France in 1306. See Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews*, (Yoseloff Publisher, 1967) Chapter 29. The Mongol expansion into East Europe resulted in a massive migration to the commercial cities of Venice and Genoa in Italy. See Preiser-Kapeller, J., Reinfandt, L., & Stouraitis, Y. "Migration History of the Afro-Eurasian Transition Zone, c. 300–1500". In *Migration Histories of the Medieval Afroeurasian Transition Zone* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2020) 1-49.

¹² Ibid. Preiser-Kapeller, J., Reinfandt, L., & Stouraitis, Y.

the Pentateuch it addresses a universal narrative of the cosmos' creation and the origins of humankind, followed by the stories of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. The Genesis stories are multi-dimensional, portraying heroes with flaws and villains with virtues and constitute a backdrop for moral dilemmas that prompt further reflection on human nature. In this respect, these narratives are suitable for explicit and allegorical depictions. The method of analysis of the illuminations is based on the formal description of the compositions of the manuscript's word panels and the iconographic interpretation of the images following medieval sources, while considering cultural, social, political and historical contexts that might have influenced the choice of images. Additionally, the alignment between the biblical text and its corresponding images is examined to understand the meaning of such iconographic composition in the framework of a Hebrew illuminated manuscript.

The second chapter presents an overview of the Rothschild Pentateuch manuscript, addressing the production of Hebrew illuminated manuscripts in the 13th C, the manuscript provenance, scribes, patron, and its iconographic program. The manuscript's scripts and page layout are also discussed. The illuminations were inspired by the imagery of the bestiaries of the 13th C. The iconographic analysis addresses the allegorical meaning of the vast repertoire of fantastic and real animals of the illuminations according to the bestiaries. It also highlights the presence of French elements throughout the manuscript.

The third chapter focuses on the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch, by performing a formal iconographic analysis of its illumination program and interpretation of the images in relation to their corresponding biblical text. This analysis will be performed for the twelve weekly readings of the Book of Genesis. The chapter concludes by eliciting the general trends of the visual allegories of the illuminations.

The fourth chapter presents a comparative analysis between the illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch's Book of Genesis with illuminations of Genesis stories from other Latin and Hebrew Bibles of the period. This comparison will focus on four Genesis stories -the Creation, Noah, Issac's Binding, and the Dreams of Joseph. This comparison would allow us to assess whether the illumination program is unique to the Rothschild Pentateuch or whether there is an overlap of the illumination program of Rothschild Pentateuch and other contemporary manuscripts. Such comparison will allow us to formulate claims about cultural and historical influences on iconographic choices. The fifth chapter, Conclusions, advances several claims in terms of patronage, illuminator identity, and iconography based on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MAKING OF THE ROTHSCILD PENTATEUCH

Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts

The Rothschild Pentateuch is a medieval manuscript, created in Europe during a time of profound social and political transformations (see Appendix I for further details). The manuscript is written in Hebrew, it was commissioned by a Jewish patron and written and illustrated for a Jewish audience.¹³ The phrase “Hebrew illuminated manuscript” refers to such a manuscript. Nonetheless, Hebrew illuminated manuscripts incorporated local methods of production and iconographic elements pervasive in Latin and Arabic manuscripts.

The earliest extant Hebrew illuminated manuscript is a Pentateuch with two carpet pages completed in 929 in Egypt¹⁴. The manuscript includes 241 folios made of calfskin where the main scribe is identified in its colophon,¹⁵ but the illuminator is unknown. The manuscript’s illuminations incorporate floral motifs resembling the frontispieces of contemporary Qurans. While the earliest extant European Hebrew manuscript dates to the 13th century. The Munich’s Rashi commentary on the Bible¹⁶ was produced in Würzburg, Germany in 1232-1233. Its visual program includes initial word panels at the beginning of each Pentateuch’s chapter (54 total) and

¹³ Mark Epstein *Skies of Parchment Seas of Ink*. (Princeton Univ. Press: Princeton, NJ, 2015), 3.

¹⁴ Housed at the National Library of Russia, former Leningrad Public Library, MS. II 17. This manuscript is also referred to as the First Leningrad Bible by Bezalel Narkiss. There is another codex, (NRL EVr1B 19a) referred to as the Leningrad Codex (or Second Leningrad Bible by B. Narkiss) produced in Egypt in 1008-1010 by the scribe Samuel son of Jacob. Both manuscripts have carpet pages with floral motifs and are part of the Firkovitch Collection.

¹⁵ Solomon Halevi son of Bouya’a

¹⁶ Housed at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, BSB, Cod. Hebr. 5/I-II.

of each Hebrew Bible book (24 total) including human figures to explicitly depict biblical narratives in the Würzburg school of manuscript illumination.¹⁷ The scribe of this manuscript is identified in the colophon but not its illuminator. Another early Hebrew manuscript is the Ambrosian Bible¹⁸ (1236-1238), completed in southern Germany. The manuscript was written by two scribes¹⁹ but its illuminator is unknown. The illuminations include images of real and fantastic animals, resembling the contemporary iconography of contemporary bestiaries and Latin manuscripts of southern Germany.

Following the shift on the usage of books that occurred in the 13th C in Europe, from public to private (see Appendix I for more detail), manuscripts from late 13th century onwards were smaller than the codices previously produced. It was also more cost effective to produce smaller books as fewer animal skins were necessary to complete a manuscript. Books for personal usage, such as the Rothschild Pentateuch, have large margins to allow annotations, were illuminated with gold and silver, and colored with bright pigments for engaging readers and to denote the prestige of the manuscript owner.

Medieval Hebrew manuscripts included the Hebrew Bible, prayer books, rabbinical literature, books addressing Jewish customs and laws, Kabbalistic texts, books of mathematics, astronomy, cartography, medicine, fables, and poetry. The production team of Hebrew Bibles included at least two scribes, one illuminator, and the supervision of a rabbi to ensure the accuracy of the text.²⁰ Rabbis occasionally served as scribes, where one scribe wrote the main

¹⁷ The Würzburg school of manuscript illumination style flourished in southern Germany by the mid- 13th C, characterized by the use of bright colors, extensive use of gold, and large compositions.

¹⁸ Housed in Milan, Ambrosian Library, MS. B. 30, 31, and 32, INF.

¹⁹ Jacob son of Samuel Ha-sofer (the scribe) and Joseph son of Kalonymos.

²⁰ Accuracy of text is critical for Bible and liturgical manuscripts. Bibles produced after the 10th century follow the text set in the Damascus Pentateuch (956).

biblical text (referred as the main scribe) and another scribe, known as micrographer, for the *masorah* (micrographic text of the cross-references). The *masorah* was usually placed at the horizontal edges of the folio around the main text. Occasionally, a third scribe added the vocalization, vowels, and cantillation marks for proper public reading of the text, otherwise, these marks were scribed by the micrographer. The main scribe supervised the work of the other scribes and illuminators. Illuminations were incorporated after the scribes' work with illustrations placed around the text or overlapping it. As in many Hebrew contemporary manuscripts, the Rothschild Pentateuch's main scribe and micrographer were identified in the colophons of the manuscript.

Although the scribes of medieval Hebrew manuscripts are known, illuminators were seldom recognized unless one of the scribes decorated the manuscript in which case were often mentioned in the manuscript. There are few exceptions in which illuminators were identified, as in the *Cervera Bible*, produced in Spain and completed in 1300, where Joseph Hazorfati (Joseph the French) signed as illuminator, and in the *Worms Mahzor* (prayer book, Germany, 1272) illuminated by Shemiah Hazorfati (Shemiah the French). These two examples are eloquent because the manuscripts were written in Spain and Germany, respectively, but the illuminators identified themselves as French, demonstrating transnational collaborations in the production of medieval illuminated manuscripts.

The kind of Hebrew script depended on the Jewish tradition of the patron and main scribe. Manuscripts produced in the Middle East, North Africa, Portugal, and Spain (of Sephardic tradition) were written in Sephardic script with a rigid reed stylus suitable for letters

with vertical and horizontal lines of the same width. In Northern Europe,²¹ Germany, France, and Italy (of Ashkenazi tradition) manuscripts were written in Ashkenazi script, with a flexible goose or crow quill suitable for letters with rounded corners, thick horizontal lines, and thin vertical ones. The text of the Rothschild Pentateuch is written in Ashkenazi script.

Because there are no capital letters in the Hebrew alphabet, decorated initials were replaced by initial word panels, where the first word of a text was decorated. The illuminations of medieval Latin and Hebrew illuminated manuscripts present a vast repertoire of common images, such as real and fantastic animals, architectural backgrounds, coat of arms, and floral motifs. Yet, the visual narrative that unfolds from the composition of these elements in Hebrew manuscripts is characteristic of them, due to the constraints on the use of the human figures.²² The juxtaposition of figures with different meanings and the choice of images that seem to be out-of-sync with the text are pervasive in medieval Hebrew illuminated manuscripts. However, when considering the social, political, and historical contexts in which a manuscript was produced, the illuminations may befit commentaries on contemporary events that impacted the Jewish life during the time of the manuscript production.²³ Illuminations of medieval Hebrew manuscripts not only embellished the text but also, in some instances, served as a chronicle of contemporary events.

²¹ By the end of the 15th C, there was a significant immigration of Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal to the Netherlands; and some 16th C and 17th C Hebrew manuscripts from the Low Countries feature Sephardic style.

²² See for example the use of animal heads for the depiction of the human figure in the Ambrosian Bible, Ulm, Germany, 1236-1238. In Hebrew manuscripts, humans with an animal head are not hybrids, but the representation of humans following the biblical command of non-idolatry of the human figure (Exodus 20:5) and 2nd rabbinical laws.

²³ See the folio 103v of the Tripartite Mahzor, MS Kaufmann, A384, produced in Germany in 1322, where a battle scene includes jousting knights and squirrels eating a nut symbolizing learning. Here, knowledge is depicted as opposite to force, a tension that was at the core of conflicts between non-Jews and Jews during the Middle Ages. Another example are the images of martyrdom used for the section corresponding to the Binding of Issac, presenting a parallel between the suffering of Abraham and contemporary Jews.

The iconography in medieval Hebrew manuscripts varied according to the type of book. Bibles tended to avoid human figures to represent a specific person²⁴ and included geometric patterns, foliage, palmettes, hybrids, zoomorphic figures, landscapes, and architectural motifs. In German Hebrew manuscripts of the 13th C onwards there are images of humans with concealed faces (covered with crowns, hair, helmets, backward posture, blurred, etc.) or human faces were replaced with animals' heads.²⁵ In contrast, books of festivals, laws and customs, fables, and poetry included anthropomorphic figures. It is important to notice that some Hebrew manuscripts included more than one kind of text, thus different iconographic programs coexisted in the same manuscript. For example, the Coburg Pentateuch (Germany, 1396) also included grammatical texts that were decorated with human figures while the biblical section was not.

On Patronage, Scribes, and Provenance of the Rothschild Pentateuch

According to the colophon of the Rothschild Pentateuch, at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, the writing of the manuscript was completed on the fiftieth day of June of the year 1296 by the scribe Elijah ben Meshulam (main text) for Joseph Martil ben Joseph.²⁶ The scribe of the *Masorah*, Elijah ben Yehiel, included his name in a micrographic rosette in the folio 224v,

²⁴ In the Duke of Sussex Pentateuch (Southern Germany, 1300) there is a text illustration at the beginning of the book of Numbers, with the image of four knights each representing a tribe that camped around the Tabernacle -Juda, Reuben, Ephraim, and Dan. Although the knights are human figures, they do not represent a person.

²⁵ See Ambrosian Bible (Ulm, 1236-38); Bird's Head Haggadah (Southern Germany, 1300); Worms Mahzor (Mainz, 1272).

²⁶ The English translation of the Hebrew colophon is the following, "I Elijah ben Meshullam the scribe completed this Pentateuch's commentary in the Hebrew translation for Joseph Martil, first born of Joseph, praises and hymns. I completed it in one year, in the 15th day of the moon of *tamuz* of the year 5056"

at the end of the book of Exodus, but there is no reference of the illuminator(s).²⁷ The Rothschild Pentateuch is currently housed at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, CA.

Little is known about the life of the Rothschild Pentateuch's patron, Joseph Martil (Martel?) ben Joseph. It is possible that Joseph Martil could refer to Joseph from the town Martel in France or from the town Hinton Martell in England.²⁸ Nevertheless, some scholars²⁹ suggested that Joseph Martil was an Englishman expelled from England following an edict by King Edward I on July 18, 1290³⁰. It is estimated that 3,000 Jews were forced out of England³¹ many of whom settled in the already established Jewish communities along the Rhine.³² Between the 12th and 14th centuries these communities³³ thrived intellectually expanding the interpretation and practice of Jewish Law, as is reflected by the profuse production of Hebrew manuscripts, comparable to the Rothschild Pentateuch.

Although there is no previous record of the main scribe of the manuscript, Elijah ben Meshulam, the Meshulam family was a rabbinic family in Provence³⁴ during the 13th C until

²⁷ There is one word panel illuminated by Joel ben Simon, active in Germany and Italy during the second half of 15th C, added after the completion of the manuscript.

²⁸ Martil is the name written in Hebrew, but in English might be spelled Martel or Martell. Martel/Martell is a family name recorded 46 times in the [National Archives of UK](#) for the period of 1200-1299. However, Joseph Martel is not listed for that period. There is one entry for Robert Martil dated November 3, 1308 (after the expulsion) in Halgton, Northumberland County, UK. There is a town called Hinton Martell in Dorset, England, dated back to the 11th C, originally referring to a "monk's village". In France there is also a town called Martel, in the Dordogne Valley, dating back to the 8th C. In the 13th C the town of Martel was a prosperous trading hub for salt and wine. It is possible that Joseph Martil was from this town, as he must have been a wealthy man, perhaps engaged in trade, to commission of such luxurious manuscript as the Rothschild Pentateuch.

²⁹ According to the Getty Museum "The text [Rothschild Pentateuch] contains features" that identify Joseph Martel as an Englishman. Marc Epstein reaffirms this claim in an article published in <https://ideas.tikvah.org/mosaic/observations/a-mysterious-erasure-in-a-700-year-old-manuscript-of-the-hebrew-bible>.

³⁰ The Edict forced Jews to leave England no later than November 1, 1290.

³¹ [National Archives](#), UK.

³² Jews were in the cities of Mainz, Worms, and Speyer since 10th C.

³³ Mainz was the leading Jewish center of the region.

³⁴ Judah Galinsky and James T. Robinson. "Rabbi Jeruham b. Meshullam, Michael Scot, and the Development of Jewish Law in Fourteenth-Century Spain." *The Harvard Theological Review* 100, no. 4 (2007), 490.

1306, when Jews were expelled from France.³⁵ It is possible that the scribe Elijah ben Meshulam was associated with the Meshulam family.³⁶ The only known manuscript that this scribe produced is the Rothschild Pentateuch. Similarly, there is no information about the scribe of the *Masorah*, Elijah ben Yehiel.³⁷

According to the provenance record published by the Getty Museum, rabbis and collectors owned the Rothschild Pentateuch. They were prominent members of the Jewish communities in Poland, Italy, and Germany, attesting to the manuscript's uniqueness and cultural value. Rabbi Akiva ben Ephraim, most likely from Poland, owned the manuscript before 1484.³⁸ In 1484 Jehiel ben Uri³⁹ acquired the manuscript in the city of Mestre, Italy, as is attested by a note of sale hand-written at the end of the book of Job.⁴⁰ During this period, a word panel was added by the illuminator Joel ben Simeon, while the manuscript was in Italy from 1484 until the end of the 18th C. The family of Rabbi Solomon ben Menahem ha-Kohen Rapa of Venice (1541-1576)⁴¹ owned the manuscript in the 16th century, when Venice and Padua were centers of Hebrew studies. Rabbi Saul Wahl Katzenellenbogen, the grandson of Rabbi Meir of Padua and

³⁵ During the 13th and early 14th C, the persecution of Jews in Spain, England, and France was motivated by religious fanaticism, blood libel, and blame for economic hardship.

³⁶ From the 12th to the 14th centuries, scribes and rabbis were registered under the same category, “magister”, in French and Italian administrative documents.

³⁷ It is possible that he was related to Rabbi Yehiel of Paris (died in 1258), but there is no evidence to support this claim.

³⁸ By the end of the 14th C the King of Poland, Casimir III the Great (1310-1370) and his successors provided protection for Jews forcibly displaced from Western Europe.

³⁹ Unknown whereabouts but it is possible that the provenance record refers to Judah ben Jehiel, a physician, Rabbi, and Talmudist active in the late 15th C in the cities of Padua and Naples.

⁴⁰ Laura M. Feign, presentation “Patrons and Collectors: The Rothschild-Wittenberg Bible and the Further Embellishment of Hebrew Manuscripts in Fifteenth-Century Italy” presented on March 18, 2026 at the Bar Ilan University, Department of Jewish Art Seminar. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvP5MvztRK0&list=PL2IBVOFC7KcQDt-s5KbYb-Ca0hvxGdZMY>

⁴¹ Rabbi Solomon ben Menahem ha-Kohen Rapa was the main Rabbi of the synagogue in Mantua in 1565.

the founder of a prominent rabbinical family⁴² active in Padua and Venice between the 16th and 17th centuries, acquired the Rothschild Pentateuch in 1622. The manuscript stayed with the Katzenellenbogen family for at least a century⁴³, when in the late 18th C this family branched into Frankfurt, Germany. The Baroness Adelaide Rothschild (1853-1935) acquired the manuscript in Frankfurt at the beginning of the 20th century⁴⁴. Although the circumstances are unknown, it is possible that the Baroness obtained the manuscript upon the death of her father, Wilhelm Carl von Rothschild, in 1901, who was an avid Judaica collector.⁴⁵ Alternatively, the manuscript might have been acquired by Adelaide and her husband, Baron Edmond Rothschild, who was “a great philanthropist and art patron.”⁴⁶

The provenance of the Rothschild Pentateuch follows western European Jews migration patterns from the 13th through the 20th centuries.⁴⁷ Joseph Martil ben Joseph commissioned the manuscript in the late 13th century, most likely for private worship and study.⁴⁸ Between the 14th and late 18th centuries the Rothschild Pentateuch was owned by scholar and rabbinical families, when the book was read and consulted as it is attested by the many handwritten glosses and wear

⁴² Rabbi Meir ben Issac Katzenellenbogen (known as Meir of Padua) founded the Katzenellenbogen family in Padua in the early 16th century. After studying in Prague, Meir went to Padua, attracted by the Jewish study centers (*yeshivot*) of the city. Rabbi Meir and his son and grandson also served as nominal rabbis in Venice.

⁴³ It is registered that in 1735 the manuscript was owned by Issac Ber ben Benjamin Hirsch Katzenellenbogen.

⁴⁴ The exact year is unknown.

⁴⁵ Wilhem Carl was the manager of the Rothschild Frankfurt House Bank and a rigorous observant Jew. He supported many charitable causes and was a collector of Hebrew incunabula, however there is no record that Wilhem Carl owned the Rothschild Pentateuch. After Wilhem Carl's death, Adelaide was involved in turning the Rothschild's old family house on 148 Judengasse, Frankfurt, into a museum. From Jewish Encyclopedia, *As Philanthropists and Art Patrons*. Retrieved on 11/11 from <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12909-rothschild#anchor7>

⁴⁶ From the obituary of Baroness Adelaide von Rothschild, published in the New York Times on June 23, 1935. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/1935/06/23/archives/baroness-de-rothschild-widow-of-edmond-noted-french-anker-and.html>

⁴⁷ L. Raspe in “The Migration of German Jews into Italy and the Emergence of Local Rites of Selihot Recitation”, in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 113 no.1 (2023), 83-104.

⁴⁸ This assertion is based on the content of the Rothschild Pentateuch that includes weekly Hebrew Bible readings and philosophical commentary.

and tear of the manuscript (see Appendix II for more detail). In the early 20th century, the manuscript was collected as an art piece by Frankfurt's Rothschild family. Adelaide von Rothschild donated the manuscript to the university library of Frankfurt in 1920. Thirty years later, the manuscript was part of an exchange for real estate between the German government and a German-Jewish family.⁴⁹ The manuscript was acquired by the Getty Museum in 2018 with the support of Carole and Roland S. Lauder.

Script, Page Layout, Iconography, and Style of the Rothschild Pentateuch

The following sections present recurrent characteristics of the manuscript's script, page layout, iconography, and style, but before discussing these topics it is worthwhile to gain some familiarity with a typical folio of the Rothschild Pentateuch as is shown folio 361v in Figure 1. As can be seen, the main text is organized in three columns, with the philosophical commentary on the right side of the folio -written in its characteristic script- the Hebrew biblical text in the center, and the Aramaic biblical text on the left column, written in a smaller font than the Hebrew text. The Hebrew text column is written in the shape of a triangle, alluding to the wisdom of its content. The *Masorah Raba* is written on the upper and lower margins of the folio using a micrographic script. The upper text of the *Masorah* is written in tabular form, while the lower text expands in geometrical motifs and a rosette. A catchword⁵⁰ in bolded font is inscribed in a square micrographic shape at the low left corner of the folio.

⁴⁹ The manuscript was sold to the J. Paul Getty Museum in 2018.

⁵⁰ Catchwords were used for the proper assemblage of the quires (booklets) of the manuscript.

The word panel is compartmented in three sections, each containing the title corresponding to a main text. The Hebrew biblical title (center) is on a blue background, while the philosophical (right) and Aramaic titles (left) are written on a vermillion background. The background of the panel presents an intricate geometrical pattern of circles inscribed in squares, giving the impression of a coffered surface.



Figure 1. Analysis of an illuminated folio of the Rothschild Pentateuch, folio 361v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

The panel is enclosed by an inner frame decorated in tracery surrounded by an external frame. The corners of the panel feature a four-petal flower inscribed in a square, while the right and left upper corners of the panel end with an oak leaf each. Next to the upper right corner there are two figures, a hybrid (human-animal) on the left side and a stork on the right, facing each other with a golden circle between their mouths. By looking at the posture of the stork and his open beak, it gives the impression that it wants to tell something to the hybrid. Two stems extend downward

from the lower corners of the panel. The right stem ends with a branch towards the right side of the folio, where a pelican is standing.

The dominant color of the word panel is vermillion, present in the bodies of the upper figures and oak leaves, on the background of two panel compartments, and in the decorated frames and stems. Blue is present in the background of one panel compartment, decorated frames and stems. Green and brown complete the details of the florals in the stem and the pelican's body. The title letters, panel corners, and sections of the stems are in gold.

On texts and Scripts

The Rothschild Pentateuch includes five kinds of texts, the biblical text of the Pentateuch (folios 1v- 498r) in Hebrew and in Aramaic Onkelos translation,⁵¹ the philosophical commentaries of the biblical text, cross references to other biblical passages (*Masorah Raba*), and cross references on proper grammar and liturgy of the biblical text (*Masorah Parva*). The folios containing the supplemental readings from the books of *Prophets* and *Judges* (folios 498v-583v) include the aforementioned texts, except for the Aramaic translation. Each kind of text uses a different script or font size. The biblical text (Hebrew or Aramaic) is written in the Ashkenazi script with vowels. The font size of the Hebrew version is slightly larger than the font of the Aramaic one. The philosophical commentary script is unique to this text and is called the *Rashi script*,⁵² this script has no vowels. Both the biblical and Rashi's scripts require the use of a flexible quill (from

⁵¹ Aramaic was the common spoken language among sages of European, Northern Africa, and Middle Eastern centers in the Middle Ages.

⁵² The Rashi script was created by scribes at least a century later of Rashi's death.

a goose or a crow) to change the thickness of the trace of the letters. The script for both the *Masorah Raba* and *Parva*, are rendered in micrography, written with a very thin quill. Both texts are without vowels, but the font of the *Masorah Raba* is slightly larger than the font for the *Masorah Parva*. The Rothschild Pentateuch is the first extant manuscript with biblical (Hebrew and Aramaic Onkelos), philosophical, and cross-referential texts. This compendium of texts became more common in Hebrew manuscripts of later centuries.⁵³ The exquisite execution of the manuscript 's scripts, reflected in biblical and philosophical texts, and in the micrography demonstrates the mastery of the scribes.

Page Layout of the Rothschild Pentateuch

The smaller size of Rothschild Pentateuch page (10.80 x 8.25 inches), as compared with earlier European Hebrew Bibles,⁵⁴ increased its versatility by facilitating the codex's private use at home and public use at the synagogue or houses of study.⁵⁵ The page layout presents the biblical Hebrew and Aramaic texts, and the philosophical commentary arranged in three columns at the center of the folio. The *Masorah Raba* was written in horizontal rows at the upper and lower margins of the folio around the central text, in response to the Talmudic tradition of "safe warding" the Scriptures, in which the cross-reference text acted as a visual fence around the

⁵³ As for example in The French Liturgical Pentateuch (Cod. Hebr. 28 of the ÖNB collection), France before 1348; the Nahman ben Baruch Pentateuch (Cod. Hebr. 14 (Schwartz, No. 15), Germany 1340, De Castro Pentateuch (Ms. 180/94), Germany, 1344.

⁵⁴ See footnote 65 of Chapter One.

⁵⁵ A manuscript like the Rothschild Pentateuch, with biblical text and philosophical commentary of the Hebrew Bible, was used for study and liturgical purposes by rabbis and scholars at home, house of study (*yeshiva*), and at synagogues. Portable codices were suitable for such usage, and it is possible that the smaller Rothschild Pentateuch attracted the owners of the manuscript between the 14th and 19th centuries.

biblical text.⁵⁶ The *Masorah Parva* was inserted between the three columns. Because the number of text lines in each column is not constant, the pages of the Rothschild Pentateuch look different but in all the folios of the Pentateuch section, the Hebrew biblical text is at the center of the folio.

The Aramaic biblical text was usually written along the Hebrew text, next to the collated margin (on the left of the Hebrew text in verso folios, and to the right in recto), and the philosophical text was written next to the outer margin of the folio. When the philosophical text was longer than the biblical text, it was written around the central text but within the area constrained by the *Masorah Raba*. The relative layout of the biblical and Rashi philosophical texts was indicative of the views of French Jewry who viewed the philosophical commentary by the French scholar more relevant than the Aramaic text, resulting in a smaller Aramaic script.⁵⁷

Occasionally, biblical and philosophical texts were written in rows of different length, forming geometrical figures such as triangles or circles as in the folio 265r in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Shaped columns of the Hebrew biblical text (center) and the Rashi commentary (left), folio 265r. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

⁵⁶ The safe warding sacred text tradition dates from the 6th C on and was a proxy to follow God's mandate to protect the scrolls inside the Arc of Covenant (Deuteronomy, 31:26).

⁵⁷ Center for Jewish Art, Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Retrieved from <https://cja.huji.ac.il/browser.php?mode=set&id=23159>

These figures had an aesthetic effect, but also addressed Kabbalistic symbolisms.⁵⁸ For example, a triangle represented self-contained divine wisdom, and it was used to culminate Hebrew biblical text columns at the end of Pentateuch books. Circles represented the eternal truth of the text.

The area allocated to text and illustrations varies throughout the Rothschild Pentateuch. Nonetheless, the width of the column of the Hebrew biblical text was kept constant such that the scribe elongated letters or wrote the first few letters of the first word of the following line to fill a row of text.⁵⁹ Furthermore, words were overwritten on illuminations to keep constant the width of the biblical text column, while some illuminated word panels reached the vertical edges of the folio, beyond the area of text. The ruling of horizontal writing lines is still visible, as well as the vertical lines that delimited the columns of the biblical and philosophical texts; the lines were ruled in red ink (for more detail see Appendix I). Pricking marks, that resulted from tracing the horizontal lines, are still visible on the vertical margins of some folios. The text of the *Masorah* had no ruled lines nor prick marks.

When the text of the *Masorah Raba* exceeded the space available on the horizontal margins, the scribe continued writing the text vertically along the outer margin or ended the paragraph in an intricate pattern of curls, rose flowers or other figures that allowed to include more text (see Figure 38, folio 489v). Moreover, changing the direction of the text of the

⁵⁸ The Kabbalistic movement is a form of Jewish mysticism that developed in the 12th through 13th centuries in Provence and Spain.

⁵⁹ Line fillers are common in other Middle Ages Hebrew manuscripts.

Masorah required the reader to turn the manuscript into different angles, in accordance with a Talmudic teaching that urged readers to study the Scriptures from different points of view.⁶⁰

The scribes of the Rothschild Pentateuch used the tools and methods of their craft (as specified in the Appendix I) but also incorporated Jewish notions regarding the relevance of the biblical text. These notions included having the Hebrew biblical text at the center of the folio surrounded, as if protected, by other explanatory texts,⁶¹ and having the *Masorah Raba* written in shapes that required the reader to change the position of the book. The manuscript not only included Jewish content but also symbolisms that guided decisions pretraining the layout of the main text, such as writing in shapes that represented the metaphysical qualities of divine wisdom (triangle) and eternal truth (circle). The page layout resulted in an aesthetic unique to the Rothschild Pentateuch. The different scripts, font sizes, vertical and horizontal arrangements of the texts, and the intricate forms of the micrography, create a sense of awe rendering the impression of entering a “sacred space” when browsing through the folios of the Rothschild Pentateuch.

The Iconography of the Rothschild Pentateuch

The illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch appear in the word panels of the Pentateuch’s weekly readings (54 total)⁶² and at the top of each supplemental weekly reading

⁶⁰ The Talmudic teaching states that the study of the Scriptures requires “Turn it over, and [again] turn it over, for all is therein. And look into it; And become gray and old therein;” (Pirkei Avot Tractate 5:22).

⁶¹ This disposition of the surrounding text “protected” the Pentateuch text and emulated its position inside the Tabernacle.

⁶² Pentateuch includes narratives that span from the Creation story (Genesis 1:1-31) up to the deliverance of the people of Israel into the land of Cannan (Deuteronomy 34:1-12).

from other books of the Hebrew Bible, 72 total.⁶³ There is one illumination for each weekly reading of the Pentateuch and supplemental text arranged in the sequential order of the readings, such that the order of the illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch denotes the annual cycle of the Hebrew Bible reading. It is important to notice that the Bible (Latin or Hebrew) was divided into chapters in the early 13th C, but the division into verses developed not until the mid-16th C in Latin printed Bibles. By the 13th C, the illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch served as the visual cue for the corresponding weekly reading⁶⁴ following the first reading from Genesis on a designated holiday.⁶⁵ The Rothschild Pentateuch illuminations provided a synthesis between the chronological and spiritual times that lay readers could follow.

The word panels have distinctive characteristics depending on the text they are associated with. The word panels for the Pentateuch chapters extend across the width of the folio, over the three columns of text, and cover about one third of the folio's height. All panels for this kind contain the initial word of the Hebrew and Aramaic biblical texts⁶⁶ and a title indicating the conclusion of the previous philosophical commentary. Most panels display three compartments, one per text title. Word panels incorporate a wide range of images, including hybrids (mix of human and animal), fantastic and real animals, florals, architectural structures, coats of arms, and human figures such as knights, kings, and maidens. The figures of the illuminations are naturalistic and expressive, following the Gothic style, and engage with one another by chasing, pointing, fighting, staring, etc., developing a visual narrative that at times is aligned with the text,

⁶³ There are more supplemental readings (haftaroth) than weekly Pentateuch readings (parashoth) because on Holidays there are special supplemental readings, also included in the Rothschild Pentateuch.

⁶⁴ The weekly readings from the Pentateuch start at different verses in a chapter.

⁶⁵ The beginning of the reading of the Bible is marked by a holiday, *Shemini Hatzeret*, when people congregate at the synagogue.

⁶⁶ All the weekly readings but the first one Genesis 1: 1-4, that has not Rashi phrase.

but occasionally they describe an independent story. Some panels have figures and stems protruding the panel frame and extending to the edges of the folio.

The word panels of the supplemental weekly readings are smaller, they contain only one word which is the Hebrew initial word of the biblical reading, are placed on top of the text, and have the width of one Hebrew text column. On average, the height of these panels is equivalent to two lines of text. These panels feature hybrids, fantastic and real animals, florals, and occasionally a human face. In these panels there are few figures and seldom there is any interaction among them. Almost in all panels of this kind there is a long decorative protruding stem that frames the Hebrew biblical text. All word panels are unique, and even though some figures were used in several panels, other artistic elements -such as their composition, spatial arrangement, color, and background- are different. The Rothschild Pentateuch presents an impressive array of unique illuminations. In the following sections, recurring iconographic elements and their allegorical value are discussed.

Fantastic Creatures and Other Animals

Animals' metaphorical meanings were captured in bestiaries that contained descriptions of real and fantastic animals and their behavior.⁶⁷ The sources for medieval bestiaries were chronicles originated in earlier times,⁶⁸ Christian religious beliefs, and empirical observations with the

⁶⁷ The most popular bestiaries of the 13th C were the Aberdeen Bestiary (England, 1200-1210) and the Ashmole Bestiary (England 1210-1220). Both manuscripts are very similar in their illumination style and catalogue of creatures.

⁶⁸ A predecessor of bestiaries was the Book VIII of Natural History by Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD), addressing mammals, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and insects. Pliny described their anatomical characteristics and behavior by considering anthropomorphic criteria, such as the animals' intellectual capacity, animals' interrelations, and relevance to humans. Later, the Christian Greek text of the *Physiologus* from the second century AD, and the encyclopedia *Etymologies* by Isidore of Seville (ca 560-636) influenced the format and content of medieval bestiaries. From Elizabeth Morrison, *Book of Beasts, The Bestiary in the Medieval World*, p. 4-5, 2009.

purpose to impart a symbolic worldview and a taxonomy of the natural world. Animals' image, as catalogued in bestiaries and other sources, depicted their morphology, but their moral value was based on their behavior. In turn, stories of bestiaries became popular folkloric tales. Because of the varied sources of medieval bestiaries and the evolving nature of tales and beliefs, some images held multiple meanings that were at times contradictory.

The real and fantastic animals of the Rothschild Pentateuch's illuminations include some of the animals catalogued in the Aberdeen (1200-1210) and Ashmole (1210-1220) English bestiaries. Despite the animal repertoire being similar, there is a difference in style between the bestiaries' stylized animals, following a Romanesque style, and the naturalistic animals of the Pentateuch⁶⁹ that were rendered in the Gothic style. The following paragraphs discuss the moral values of real and fantastic animals that are recurrent in the Rothschild Pentateuch illuminations.

The Rothschild Pentateuch's most recurrent animal figure is the dragon, with an appearance rate of 18.1%. Since antiquity, dragon-like creatures were considered "the possessors of wisdom and oracular vision,"⁷⁰ while by the 8th and 11th centuries Norse traditions viewed dragons as guardians of treasures that dwelled in caves.⁷¹ Similarly, dragons were included in gargoyles placed on the external walls of Gothic cathedrals and castles to guard them from unwanted intruders.⁷² From 1200 onwards, dragons were viewed as powerful and large animals with a deadly tail and were associated with evil and deception.⁷³ In the Rothschild Pentateuch, dragons are usually depicted with other dragons, in the body of a word panel or on

⁶⁹ With exception of the image for the *snake scitalis* in the Aberdeen Bestiary folio 68v, which is like some of the dragons depicted in the Rothschild Pentateuch, and the image of the turtle dove.

⁷⁰ Rowland, p. 66.

⁷¹ This view of dragons is prevalent in the Norse and Icelandic sagas. See, Joyce Tally Lionarons, *Medieval Beasts* (London: British Library, 2015).

⁷² Kleiner, *Gardener's Art Through the Ages*, p. 389.

⁷³ Morrison, p. 26 and Aberdeen Bestiary, folio 66r.

its border, or interlaced with floral motifs protruding from the panel. In some instances, floral stems emerge from dragon tails.

The Rothschild Pentateuch birds are usually shown perching on a stem or panel border facing to or away from other figures. Since late antiquity⁷⁴ and until the end of the Middle Ages, it was believed that birds could exert their power on other creatures by facing them.⁷⁵ Pelicans abound in the illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch, with an appearance rate of 16.1%. They symbolized piety and sacrifice for its chicks.⁷⁶ A pelican facing towards or away other panel figures indicated whether piety was granted to them or not. Storks, with an appearance rate of 4.7%, represented filial and parental love because it was believed that storks cared for children and their aging parents. It also represented marital love and fertility.⁷⁷

The appearance rate of dogs in the manuscript is 15.1%. They had several moral meanings, representing intelligence and loyalty or alternatively a vengeful and evil spirit.⁷⁸ In antiquity it was considered an animal with magical powers over life and death, and in Egypt it was a pharaonic symbol. For Greeks and Romans dogs were a symbol of loyalty.⁷⁹ But in the Hebrew Bible, dogs had a negative and derogative connotation, as it is written “Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who died in the town shall be eaten by dogs” (Kings I 14:11). In medieval times, dogs represented promiscuity and were a metaphor for sinful copulation and

⁷⁴ The first reference of the healing power of bird's look was in Physiologus, a compendium of animals and their moral values written between the second and fourth centuries AD, by a Christian monk in Alexandria. Physiologus is one of the sources of the Aberdeen Bestiary.

⁷⁵ As in the case of the *caladrius*, a bird that had healing powers. It was believed that when the bird faced an ill person they will heal and die if the bird faced away.

⁷⁶ Morrison p.24 and Aberdeen Bestiary, folio 35r.

⁷⁷ *The Art of Reading in the Middle Ages* project, Retrieved from <https://www.europeana.eu/en/stories/reading-symbols-on-european-medieval-objects>.

⁷⁸ Rowland, p. 60.

⁷⁹ Rowland p. 58-59.

evil.⁸⁰ According to the Aberdeen Bestiary, “No creature is more intelligent than the dog,... A dog’s tongue, licking a wound heals it,”⁸¹ but when describing some of a dog’s habits “Then the dog, ... took up the arms of vengeance. The dog returning to its vomit signifies those who, after making their confession, heedlessly return to wrongdoing.”⁸²

Another recurrent animal in the manuscript is the lion, with an appearance rate of 8.8%. Since antiquity the lion symbolized kingship, as a lion was considered the king of all animals, and was the first animal depicted in medieval bestiaries and early sources.⁸³ Indeed, lions were used in lineage emblems and represented Jesus Christ. According to Christological ideas, it was believed that male lions were able to resurrect their dead born cubs after three days by breathing on them, an allegory to Jesus Christ’s resurrection.⁸⁴

Rabbits⁸⁵ appear in 7.3% of the illuminated figures. Usually, rabbits are shown chased by dogs. In antiquity a rabbit was a symbol of fertility associated with the goddess Venus.⁸⁶ But between the 12th and 15th centuries rabbits acquired a polyvalent moral meaning, they represented prolificacy due to their high reproduction rate,⁸⁷ while from the 12th C onwards, rabbits signified vulnerability and timidity. In many bestiaries and books about the natural world, it was stated that rabbits would flee their burrow or recoil, lowering their head if they perceived a

⁸⁰ Rowland p. 60-61

⁸¹ From the Aberdeen Bestiary, folio 18r through folio 19v. Retrieved from <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f18r>

⁸² Idib. folio 19v.

⁸³ Morrison, p. 7.

⁸⁴ Morrison, p. 14.

⁸⁵ In both bestiaries the rabbit/hare/coney/ cuniculus (all medieval names for rabbits or hares) appears only in the images of Adam naming the animals, but there is no folio dedicated to this animal describing its behavior. Thus, the illuminator of the Rothschild Pentateuch used a different source for the rabbit’s allegory.

⁸⁶ Beryl Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism* (The Univ. of Tennessee Press: Knoxville, 1973), 133.

⁸⁷ Claude K. Abraham, “Myth and Symbol: The Rabbit in Medieval France,” in *Studies in Philology*, 60, no. 4 (1963), p589-597.

threat.⁸⁸ In medieval English folklore, a rabbit represented a "burrowed soldier or someone who fled from his pursuers."⁸⁹

Although scarce in the manuscript, hybrids of mammals and birds such as basilisks, were believed to have a great force that resembled the one of a lion, they were deadly to humans,⁹⁰ and harmed other animals even with their gaze or scent.⁹¹ These hybrids were used as a symbol of domination and destruction⁹² and in the Rothschild Pentateuch are usually depicted facing other animals or the reader. Hybrids of humans and animals, on the other hand, are recurrent in the Rothschild Pentateuch with an appearance rate of 10.8%.

A peculiar hybrid creature of the Rothschild Pentateuch is the mermaid. Although it appears only once in the manuscript, in the folio 393r of the Book of Numbers (see Figure 3), the presence of a mermaid in a Hebrew Bible is very atypical. Mermaids, usually depicted with the upper body of a naked woman and a lower body of a fish, were considered creatures that enticed souls through lust and seduction.⁹³ The image in folio 393r depicts an adaptation of the mermaid figure as only her face attached to a fish body is shown, while she is holding a mirror in front of a dog running towards her.⁹⁴

The presence of human faces in the illumination program of the Rothschild Pentateuch, amounting to 6.7% of the figures, is very intriguing because of the controversy regarding the

⁸⁸ From *Liber de natura rerum* by Thomas Cantimpre (Brussels, 1201-1277).

⁸⁹ Rowland *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism*, p. 135. This depiction of the rabbit was because rabbits burrowed themselves in ground mounds to survive the harsh British climate when they were introduced in the 12th C.

⁹⁰ Morrison, p. 17.

⁹¹ As the case of the basilisk, from Aberdeen bestiary, folio 66r.

⁹² Rowland, p. 87.

⁹³ Rowland, p. 140.

⁹⁴ In the Middle Ages, the mirror had multiple meanings according to the Church and Talmudic views, it can represent the reflection of a pure soul or lust.

depiction of the human figures (face and body) in Jewish tradition.⁹⁵ In the Rothschild Pentateuch there are images of a human body with an animal face, or human faces included in hybrids, inserted in floral stems, or in half-human bodies.⁹⁶ In general, the depicted faces do not refer to a particular person⁹⁷ or the face is partially hidden. Perhaps the lack of full-body images and the use of generic or concealed faces turned these illuminations acceptable for a Jewish audience.



Figure 3. Image of a mermaid holding a mirror, folio 393r. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

One salient characteristic of the Rothschild Pentateuch illuminations is the interaction among the figures of a panel through explicit actions such as chasing, pointing, fighting, and

⁹⁵ According to the Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 43b:1-15), figures of faces are permitted, except for the human face.

⁹⁶ Except for the illumination of the folio 478, that was added in mid 15th C, about two centuries after the completion of the Rothschild Pentateuch.

⁹⁷ The figure of the Phillip IV King of France (1285-1314) appears in two word-panels, in the book of Exodus and in Leviticus. These images will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

blowing. Additionally, is noticeable the persistence of a small golden circle next to the mouth of hybrids, animals, and human faces, either when these figures are isolated or facing each other. Unlike other small golden circles interlaced in florals and stems, these circles are placed next to a figure's mouth signifying speech or breath,⁹⁸ and when the circle is at the center between two facing figures it represents a conversation.⁹⁹ In an illumination program mainly based on real and fantastic animals, these indicators are critical to denote conversations between creatures or to convey emotions, and they would be less necessary if the illuminations were based on human figures or hybrids with human faces. The presence of this symbol next to figures' mouths indicates an interactive dynamic among them and are "speech markers".

Moreover, the inclusion of speech markers in animal-based illuminations provides the animals with a human character, reaffirming their moral value and allegorical role in the iconography of the images. In other words, talking animals become people, and because of the generic nature of "an" animal, they represent universal human characters according to their moral value (i.e., pious, evil, innocent, etc...). The biblical text constrains the narrative to individuals (i.e., Noah, Moses, etc...) while the imagery makes the narrative universal. Current research on gestures, body language, and sensorial and emotional expressions in medieval illuminations focuses on human figures.¹⁰⁰ The vast illumination program of the Rothschild Pentateuch presents an opportunity to conduct such analysis on allegorical-based illuminations.

⁹⁸ This statement is aligned with Michael Camille's claim that the unconventional nature of the marginalia allowed for the visualization of senses, such sound, odor, touch, etc.. Speech, being associated with sound, is one of them. In *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*. P 13-22. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992.

⁹⁹ Sarah Stanbury, "Bearing the Word: Speech Scrolls, Touch, and the Carthusian Miscellany," in *Literature and the Senses*, p. 24. ed. Simon P. James and Nandini Das Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Sarah Stanbury, and Guillemette Bolens, "Kinesics Intelligence, Medieval Illuminated Psalters, and the Poetics of the Psalms," in *Studia Neophilologica* 94, no. 2 (2022), 123–139.

The French Connection

The most striking indication of a French influence in the Rothschild Pentateuch, is what presumably could be the image of the face of Phillip IV, King of France (1285-1314) in the folio 130r in the Book of Exodus (Figure 4a) and in the Book of Leviticus, folio 227r (Figure 4b).



Figure 4. (a) Portrait of Phillip IV King of France, lower right corner, folio 130r. (b) Image of Phillip IV King of France and knight on horse spearing a pelican, folio 227r. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

In the Exodus illumination (Figure 4a), the King is wearing a crown and is next to the image of a woman's face (perhaps his wife, Joan I of Navarre) at the lower right corner of the folio. The panel depicts a Gothic style building resting on the king's head through a column. The interior of the building is decorated with dragons, birds, and florals. The reading associated with this word panel narrates when God reveals His name to Moses, recalls the covenant He did with Abraham,

Issac, and Jacob, and promised to free the Israelites from bondage in Egypt (Exodus 6: 2-8). The building might represent the Tabernacle where the Ark of the Covenant was housed, and the image of King Phillip IV might be an allusion to Pharaoh's oppression of the Israelites.

The second word panel of the Book of Leviticus (see Figure 4b) depicts a man who closely resembles the face of King Phillip IV as is shown in a 16th C portrait of King Phillip IV.¹⁰¹ The image of the crowned King is below the panel frame and a triangular shape that separates the Aramaic and the Hebrew title words, gives the impression that the King is wearing a pointed conical hat.¹⁰² On top of the panel there is a knight spearing a pelican. This panel is associated with the reading of restitutions due to acts of deception and theft, including laws of restitution of stolen property (Leviticus 6:1-7). Perhaps this illumination is an allusion to King Phillip IV, who imposed heavy taxes on his vassals and in 1306 expelled the Jews from France while in 1307 destroyed the Knights Templars, finally acquiring the possessions of Jews and Templars.

In addition to the portraits of King Phillip IV, images of his crown and royal French symbols appear in other illuminations. For example, in the folio 186v (not shown), there is a crown like the one worn by King Phillip IV in folio 130r (Figure 4a) floating on top of a one-head-two-body lion facing the reader sticking its tongue out. The lion was a symbol of royal power,¹⁰³ and along with the lily flower (*fleur-de lis*) they appear throughout the illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch, prominently in the only carpet page of the manuscript in folio 226v in

¹⁰¹ The portrait, *Philip IV the Fair* is part of an historical collection, *Recueil des Rois de France*, by Jean du Tillet, 1550.

¹⁰² In the 13th C pointed conical hats were associated with Jews (in Germany there was a decree that Jews needed to wear a distinctive pointed hat) thieves, and sorcerers.

¹⁰³ In a 14th C painting by Raymond de Béziers, ca. 1313, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS lat. 8504, King Phillip IV was portrayed with two lions at his feet.

Figure 5, at the conclusion of the Book of Exodus. The carpet page was placed after the Bible section discussing the setting of the Tabernacle that contained the ritual lampstand (Exodus 40:1-36).¹⁰⁴ The carpet page features a lampstand framed by a gothic cathedral, at its base there are two lily flowers (on the left and right sides of the lampstand), and two lions on the right and left corners of the carpet page. The cathedral might refer to the Tabernacle, where the lampstand was housed.

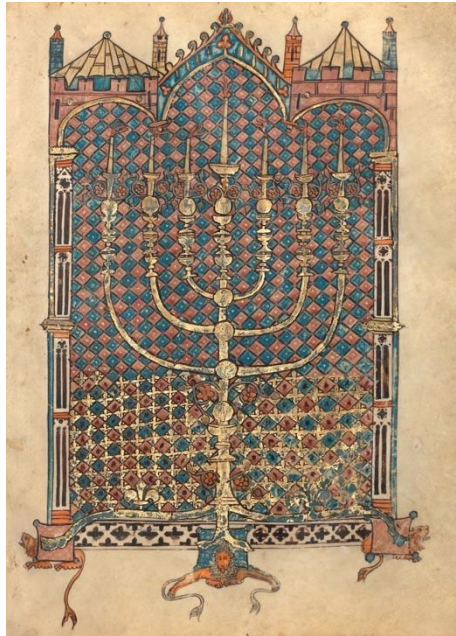


Figure 5. Carpet page, folio 226v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

Coats of arms were established by the mid 12th century in Western Europe to identify royalty and knights in the battlefield. Coats of arms followed design principles and color codes to denote family lineage and places. By the 13th century, noble families used coat of arms to demonstrate their family lineage and identity. Although the Rothschild Pentateuch illuminations

¹⁰⁴ The lampstand referred to in Exodus 40:1-36 was described in Exodus 25:31-40 as a seven-lamp candelabra (*menorah*).

feature many different coats of arms, it has no images of Jewish heraldic emblems.¹⁰⁵ Few prominent wealthy Jewish families in the medieval period had emblems, but they were not recognized coats of arms.¹⁰⁶ The coats of arms depicted in the manuscript either belonged to mainstream nobility (French or English) or were fictitious. The emblem in the coat of arms on folio 150r, in Figure 6, corresponds to the French crown, while the coat of arms on the upper left corner of folio 111r (not shown), with three hollowed circles in a triangular formation, is similar to a medieval coat of arms catalogued in a 16th C French Heraldry compendium.¹⁰⁷ This same coat of arms, but with a different color scheme, is in the hand of a fighting knight in folio 169r (not shown).



Figure 6. French emblem, folio 150r. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

¹⁰⁵ Jewish heraldic emblems were used for sealing wedding contracts, commercial transactions, and other legal documents, but the emblems did not follow the design rules of the noble's coat of arms.

¹⁰⁶ In the 13th C Jews were not granted official permission to have a coat of arms.

¹⁰⁷ Archives and manuscripts at the Bodleian Library
<https://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/archivesandmanuscripts/author/alicewhichelow/>

The presence of French elements in the iconographic repertoire of the Rothschild Pentateuch is undeniable. Because there is no record of the illuminator, nor any known chronicle of the way the illuminator, scribe, and patron interacted, the rationale for the choice of the iconographic repertoire is not certain. Nonetheless, the patron Joseph Martil ben Joseph must have been satisfied with the Rothschild Pentateuch illumination program, in terms of its content and style, indicating a preference towards French imagery.

Style and Color

Romanesque and Early French Gothic (1100-1200) architecture is the predominant style of the illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch. Some panels have the shape of a gothic building, as in folio 130r (see Figure 4a), whereas in other illuminations buildings protrude from the panel, as in folio 277v in Figure 7. These buildings are characterized by semicircular arches, turrets with long narrow windows, brick facades, and three-level structures.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ These features characterized the Southern French Gothic style, with Romanesque's semicircular arches, the use of bricks, and narrow windows.



Figure 7. French Gothic castle with knight, folio 277v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

Moreover, there is a figure of a knight on top of the building depicted in folio 277v, perhaps alluding to the fact that the Southern French Gothic style thrived after a military victory of the Crusaders.¹⁰⁹

The style of the figures of the illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch is French Gothic, characterized by decorated frames and backgrounds with elaborated designs, interacting and expressive figures, playful and mocking compositions with hybrids, fantastic creatures and animals at the margin of the folio, with compositions framed within architectural structures. Most of the marginal images of the Rothschild Pentateuch were related to the biblical text or panel illumination, either by reinforcing the allegory of the panel illumination, or by adding a

¹⁰⁹ The campaign was the Albigensian Crusade (1209-1229) in Southern France that resulted in the elimination of the Cathars, and the establishment of the Medieval Inquisition and the establishment of the Dominican Order as the representatives of the Church.

contemporary “critique” to the illustration that alluded to the Jewish life in 13th C Ashkenaz. Marginal images were inserted in decorative stems extending from the word panel.

Some panels’ backgrounds display a delicate design of florals or lattice-like patterns painted in white or yellow, on a blue or red background reminiscent of the intricate tracery of the Gothic architectural style. Panel borders display coffered-like geometric patterns of squares, circles, and four-flower petals rendering a three-dimensional effect to the backgrounds where the panel background seemed receding from the surface of the folio. Most word panels have two or three frames (at least an inner and outer frame) differentiated by their color or pattern. Usually, one of the frames was gilded.

During the Middle Ages, colors carried symbolic meanings depending on their context. Blue was associated to the divine but also denoted power,¹¹⁰ yellow, due to its resemblance of gold, was used in many heraldic emblems and signified light, as is reflected by the predominant colors in the French Gothic style, gold and blue. Colors were also associated with social status, with red and blue the colors of nobility, perhaps associated with the high cost of these pigments.

In the 13th C, the ultramarine blue was produced from lapis lazuli, a precious stone from Asia, while vermillion was produced from mineral cinnabar, a pricey mineral. Vermilion red and ultramarine blue are the prevalent colors in the Rothschild Pentateuch word panels’ backgrounds and figures, with approximately 42.1% of the Pentateuch’s illuminations are painted in vermillion and 39.1% in ultramarine blue. Almost all Hebrew initial words of the biblical text were gilded in gold. Gold was also used to highlight panels’ architectural details (such as

¹¹⁰ Fitzwilliam Museum, retrieved from <https://colour-illuminated.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/explore/colour-and-meaning>.

columns, roofs, and windows), panel borders, floral motifs, and stems details. Silver¹¹¹ was used more scarcely, in few letters of initial words, coats of arms, mirrors, knight armors, and corner panels. Silver is mostly seen in the last illuminations of the supplemental weekly readings.

The Rothschild Pentateuch's illuminations feature a broad range of colors, including, pink, red, orange, yellow, blue, cyan, green, brown, grey, black, and white. Every panel displays multiple colors. Pigments were obtained in market fairs in Venice¹¹² and Paris, both centers for pigment trade, denoting the onerous execution of the manuscript. Most colors of the illuminations are still very bright, but there are some faded colors, as in the illumination of the first reading (Genesis 1:1-31, in folio 1v), perhaps a sign of intense use, while signs of abrasion appear in some golden and silver letters and floral details.

Besides a word panel added in the 15th C attributed to Joel ben Simeon,¹¹³ of Italian baroque style, the illuminated folios of the Rothschild Pentateuch are consistent in terms of style and color. But there is one illumination that is distinct from the others, in folio 424v Figure 8, suggesting that two artists, so far unknown, were involved in the illumination of the manuscript.

¹¹¹ Silver corroded the parchment, so the lesser silver in the manuscript can be due to the illuminator's choice or the corrosion process.

¹¹² Venice was a hub center for the acquisition of lapis lazuli from Asia.

¹¹³ Joel ben Simeon was a scribe and illuminator active in Germany and Northern Italy between 1449 and 1492. His style is distinctive; he uses human figures and explicit illustrations to illuminate biblical text.



Figure 8. Basilisk, folio 424v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

The illumination of folio 424v renders the fantastic creatures in great detail and larger size than the ones included in other folios, with the predominance of grey, a color seldom used in the other illuminations. There is a basilisk, unique to this folio, at the center of the composition holding the base of the word panel. It is flanked by two dragons with floral tails. The tail of the right dragon overlaps with a downward stem emerging from the panel, suggesting that the basilisk and the flanking creatures were added at a later time. In addition to the possibility of at least two illuminators, the Rothschild Pentateuch presents many different handwritten scripts in glosses on its margins. A paleographic study along with spectroscopical and chemical analyses of its folios could shed light on its origin and physical characteristics of the illuminations, that in turn would provide information about the provenance of its pigments, its illuminators, or the artistic workshops that could have been involved in the manuscript production.

CHAPTER THREE

CASE STUDY: THE BOOK OF GENESIS ICONOGRAPHY

Out of the five books of the Pentateuch, Genesis is the one that addresses a universal narrative for the creation of the cosmos and the beginnings of humankind (chapters 1-11). Following this narrative, the Book shifts from the universal to the particular by addressing a family story with the whereabouts of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob (chapters 12-50). Both narratives, the universal and particular, provide a background for addressing moral dilemmas ubiquitous throughout the Book. The stories of Genesis are multi-dimensional, portraying heroes with flaws and villains with some virtues, yet serving a purpose for the discussion of ethical and moral dilemmas. The moral and ethical issues addressed in the Book of Genesis lend themselves to an allegorical illumination program. Using the Rothschild Pentateuch 's Book of Genesis as a case study, this section analyzes the iconography of its illuminations in relation to the biblical text. It is assumed that if the illumination program follows a text rich in intertextuality¹¹⁴, internal consistency of iconographic elements is to be expected.

The Book of Genesis presents an illuminated word panel for each of its weekly readings, resulting in twelve illuminated panels. These illuminations display recurring images such as: dragons depicted in eight readings (*Bereshit*, *Noah*, *Lech-Lecha*, *Vayera*, *Chayei Sarah*, *Toldot*, *Vayshlach*, and *Vayechei*), lions appearing in seven readings (*Noah*, *Lech-Lecha*, *Vayera*, *Chayei Sarah*, *Toldot*, *Vayeshev*, and *Miketz*), dogs depicted in seven readings (*Lech-Lecha*, *Toldot*,

¹¹⁴ Intertextuality refers to text that has parallel narratives to other texts.

Vayetze, Vayishlach, Vayeshev, Miketz, and Vayechei), coat of arms appearing in six weekly readings (*Bereshit, Noah, Vayera, Chayei Sarah, Vayeshev, and Miketz*), rabbis depicted in four readings (*Lech-Lecha, Vayetze, Vayishlach, and Vayeshev*), building facades appearing in four readings (*Bereshit, Lech-Lecha, Vayera, and Vayshlach*), storks depicted in three readings (*Chayei Sarah, Toldot, and Vayeshev*), hybrids -a human face with an animal body- depicted in two weekly readings (*Bereshit and Noah*), pelicans appearing in two readings (*Vayetze and Vayechei*), and mirrors depicted in two readings (*Bereshit and Noah*). These figures, many of which held a polyvalent meaning, were metaphors for notions of morality, power, and emotions such that the synergy of the images created a visual allegory for depicting the text narratives. The following paragraphs address the rationale about the choice of meaning for polyvalent images of the Book of Genesis.

Dragon: As it was indicated in the previous chapter, dragons had two meanings. They represented evil and deception by luring the just and innocent into sins and suffocating them,¹¹⁵ or they were considered treasure guardians with an acute foresight vision.¹¹⁶ The interpretation of dragons in the current analysis depends on the context of the illumination. When a dragon is staring at another figure in the panel or is placed at the panel's border, the allegory of its oracular vision is considered. But if the dragon is biting or nibbling another figure it is considered a destructive being.

Lion: As it was mentioned before, lions had the power of resurrecting dead cubs through breathing and were also considered a regal symbol. The image of a lion breathing on a dead cub

¹¹⁵ Aberdeen Bestiary folio 65v.

¹¹⁶ Dragons were believed to be "the guardian of treasure, the possessor of wisdom, and the oracular vision" See Rowland, p. 66.

lying on its back while the lioness mother watched her cub coming to life, is depicted in the earliest extant illustrated manuscript of *Physiologus*¹¹⁷ dated from 9th to 10th centuries (Bern, Switzerland, Burgerbibliothek, Cod 318).¹¹⁸ The resurrection image was repeated in later bestiaries¹¹⁹ and manuscripts about the natural world and it was a widespread allegory about Christ's resurrection and resurrecting power. The interpretation of lions in the current analysis depends on the context of the illumination. When a lion is sticking its tongue out on top of a cub it is interpreted as a resurrecting act, but when a lion interacts with other animals -dogs or rabbits- it is considered a symbol of kingdom.

Dog: As it was indicated before, dogs had two meanings, although not excluding ones, representing loyalty and evil spirit. The interpretation of dogs in the current analysis depends on the context of the illumination. When dogs are depicted as pursuers, as in most of the illuminations, they are interpreted by their evil meaning as a foe of the persecuted. When a dog appears in illuminations associated with a text that mentions Pharaoh, the dog is considered a representation of him.¹²⁰

Coat of Arms: The coats of arms depicted in the Book of Genesis are considered symbols of family ancestry and lineage, not referring to a particular family.

Rabbit: As it was indicated before, rabbits were considered prolific, timid, or fearful animals, viewed as "someone who fled from his pursuers."¹²¹ The interpretation of rabbits in the

¹¹⁷ *Physiologus* was written by the 2nd C AD.

¹¹⁸ McCulloch, Florence. *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries*. (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1962).

¹¹⁹ The image of a resurrecting cub appears in the Harley Bestiary (1230-1240) British Library Harley MS 4751, the Workshop Bestiary (1185, Morgan Library MSM.81), and the Rochester Bestiary (c. 1230, British Library Royal MS 12 F XIII).

¹²⁰ Dogs were a Pharaonic symbol.

¹²¹ Rowland, p. 135.

current analysis depends on the context of the illumination. The rabbit's reproductive fertility alludes to the Israelites, as it is written "God takes Abram outside and tells him to count the stars, saying, "So shall your offspring be." (Genesis 15:5). When a rabbit is pursued by another animal it represents the persecuted party referred in the biblical text.

Building facades: Buildings represented God's protection, as it is written "The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run to it and are safe." (Proverbs 18:10). Building structures refer to the enclosure and protection of sacred objects.

Stork and Pelican: As was indicated in the previous chapter, these birds had no polyvalent meanings, so their interpretation is straightforward. Storks represented maternal, filial, and marital love,¹²² while pelicans represented piety and sacrifice.¹²³

Mirror: In medieval times, mirrors had two contradictory meanings. They were thought to be an image of the cosmos and God and were a metaphor for truth and virtue. On the other hand, mirrors, that reflected the imperfect human body, were related to notions of lust and deception.¹²⁴ According to the Talmud mirrors were instruments of vanity, luring unsolicited spirits. The interpretation of mirrors in the current analysis is based on the notion of lust and vanity, as the idea of an object reflecting the image of God would not be acceptable in Hebrew manuscripts. The following section includes the analysis of each of the twelve illuminations corresponding to the chapters of the Book of Genesis.

¹²² Rondeau, M. *The piety of storks* (Master's Thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, 2005), 61. Retrieved from <https://ucalgary.scholaris.ca>. doi:10.11575/PRISM/2414

¹²³ Pelicans represent Christ sacrifice in the Cross. See Morrison, p. 4 and 6.

¹²⁴ Hancock, P. M. *Transformations in the iconography of the mirror in medieval art* (Order No. 8816943), 1988. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/transformations-iconography-mirror-medieval-art/docview/303643497/se-2>

Iconographic Analysis of the Illuminations of the Book of Genesis

This section addresses the narrative of the biblical text, along with the description of its corresponding illumination, and the iconographic interpretation of the composition for each weekly reading of the Book of Genesis.

Bereshit

This reading (Genesis 1:1–6:8), corresponds to the beginning of the Book of Genesis, and is about the creation of the universe, when God created light out of chaos, the earth and the sky, the stars and the moon, the plants, birds, fish, beasts of the earth, and man. God also created the Garden of Eden with trees bearing fruit “pleasing to the eye.” The Garden included four rivers, the first river is Pishon, that winds through the land of Havilah, where gold and lapis lazuli abound; the second river is Gihon, that winds through the land of Cush (Ethiopia), and two additional rivers Tigris and Euphrates that run east of Ashur. God also created a “fitting counterpart” (Eve) for the Human (Adam), and presented all living creatures to Adam to name them. The reading continues with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the birth of Cain and Abel, and Cain’s murder of his brother Abel.

Description of the word panel. The word panel for *Bereshit* is shown in the folio 1v, in Figure 9 featuring its first word, *bereshit* (“in the beginning” in Hebrew). The top of the panel is framed by the roof of a Gothic building. The panel features two dragons, an owl, and a hybrid (man and mammal) blowing a horn, all interlaced in floral curls. The owl is at the center of the composition, flanked by one dragon with a fish-fin on the left, and an earth-dragon on the right. The dragons are staring away from the panel’s border. Four stems frame the Hebrew, Aramaic,

and biblical commentary texts. From the right dragon's mouth, a floral stem emerges that has another dragon along the right side of the folio; two short floral stems extend down from the lower border of the panel, and an additional floral stem frames the text along the left side. There is a coat of arms on the low left corner, and on the top left corner, next to the biblical commentary, there is a mirror. The *Masorah Raba*, written in micrography in the upper and lower margins of the folio along with the left and right stems guardrail the biblical text. The lower *masoretic* text ends with a rosette and undulated chain.



Figure 9. Illumination for the Parasha Bereshit, folio 1v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms. 116)

Interpretation. This composition displays the Garden of Eden. It is represented by interlaced and connected figures, and profuse floral motives with an owl, that in the medieval

times it was believed to be perching on the Tree of Knowledge,¹²⁵ at the center of the composition. A building structure protects the paradisiac Garden of Eden. The beasts of the sea and earth are represented by the left and right dragons at the border of the panel, while guarding the Garden. The left dragon has fins perhaps depicting the big “sea monsters” (*Taninim* in Hebrew, Genesis 1:21). The floral stems of this word panel represent the four rivers. The Pishon River is depicted by a gold and blue left stem (from “the land of gold and lapis lazuli”), the Gihon River is represented by the right stem that includes a winged dragon¹²⁶ (symbol for Ethiopia), and the Tigris and Euphrates are represented by the two central parallel downward floral stems. The mirror, a symbol of lust, represents the consciousness of nakedness of Adam and Eve when they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. The interlaced composition of images refers to Genesis’s cosmovision of an interconnected and chaotic universe.

This weekly reading alludes to wind in two ways: as a hovering force (“...a wind from God sweeping over the water”, Genesis 1: 2) and for infusing life (“ God formed a Human from the soil’s humus, blowing into his nostrils the breath of life”, Genesis 1:7), and is represented by the hybrid figure blowing a horn on the lower left corner of the panel. The coat of Arms marks the beginning of Adam’s lineage and his position as the “ruler” over the other living creatures. It also might refer to the family that commissioned the manuscript, as a symbol of power and continuity.

Noah

¹²⁵ In the Middle Ages it was believed that owls loved dark places, were the enemies of all true believers, and perched on the Tree of Knowledge. See Rowland p. 12.

¹²⁶ It was believed that dragons came from Ethiopia and India, such as the winged dragon “Draco Aethopius.”

This weekly reading (Genesis 6:9–11:32) is about the stories of Noah, a pious man, to whom God commanded to build an ark to save all animal species from a flood that lasted 40 days and 40 nights, and destroyed all other living creatures. When the earth dried, Noah, “the tiller of the soil” planted the first vineyard. He consumed its wine and became drunk, exposing his naked body while falling asleep. Two of his three sons covered Noah's nakedness to preserve his dignity, but one son, Ham, mocked him. Noah cursed Ham and his descendants, the people of Canaan. This reading ends listing Noah's lineage, from which all people originated.

Description of the word panel. The word panel for the *Noah* is the folio 12r, shown in Figure 10, featuring its first word, *ele* (“these” in Hebrew). On the top left side of the panel there is a dragon nibbling the lower tip of a coat of arms featuring three silver stripes. Below the panel there are two hybrids (human head and lion body) at the center of the folio. The left hybrid has the head of an old person, while the right one has the head of a young person. The young hybrid is sticking its tongue out; between them there is a mirror. In the lower marginalia, below these hybrids there is a horizontal stem, and in the middle (below the mirror) there is a head of a lion facing the reader sticking out its tongue. The top and lower *masoretic* texts culminate with ornamented figures, and along with the lower marginalia guardrail the biblical text. The Hebrew (top center) and Aramaic (top right) biblical text columns are written in inverted triangular shapes.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ According to the symbolism of the Kabbala a triangle denotes divine wisdom, while a circle eternal true.



Figure 10. Illumination for the Parasha Noah, folio 12r. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms. 116)

Interpretation. The hybrids represent Noah and his son Ham, who mocked him. In this reading there is also an allusion to youth's maliciousness, "Never again will I doom the earth because of humankind, since the devising's of the human mind are evil from youth" (Genesis 8:21), captured by the image of an irreverent young hybrid. The mirror is associated with lust, symbolizing Noah's nakedness.

The dragon nibbling the coat of arms might represent the destruction of "all flesh" (Genesis 6:17) that the flood brought upon humanity. "I will blot out all existence" (Genesis 6:21). The coat of arms,¹²⁸ represents the lineage of the people of the earth, who were described as "violent and corrupt" (Genesis 6:11-13). The image of the lion (king of the beasts) at the bottom marginalia might symbolize the power of Noah and his sons, as is written, "The fear and

¹²⁸ Identified as a 13th C French coat of arms for Comte du Foix, in the region of the Occitanie, close to the Pyrenees.

the dread of you shall be upon all the animals of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky—everything with which the earth is astir—and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hand.” (Genesis 9:2). The lion sticking out its tongue might refer to humankind’s resurrection after the flood.

Lech-Lecha

This weekly reading (Genesis 12:1–17:27) narrates Abraham’s journey to Canaan. Along the way Abram (later in this chapter Abram’s name changes to Abraham) built several God’s altars and a covenant between him and God was sealed, where God promised Abraham the land of Canaan. There was a drought in Canaan, and Abraham went down to Egypt to abate famine. Upon entering Egypt, Abraham presented his wife Sarai (later in the chapter her name changes to Sarah) to Pharaoh as his sister.¹²⁹ Ultimately, Pharaoh expelled Abraham and his clan from Egypt because “God afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty plagues on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram” (Genesis 12:17). Abraham and his clan went back to Canaan, but Lot, Abraham’s nephew, separated from his kinsfolk and went east of the Jordan valley. Sarah was barren and presented to Abraham her maidservant Hagar to conceive a child. Hagar gave birth to a boy, who Abraham named Ishmael. The terms of the Covenant between God and Abraham were ratified.

Description of the word panel. The word panel for *Lech Lecha* is shown in the folio 23r in Figure 11, featuring the first word, *veiemor* (“and He told” in Hebrew).

¹²⁹ As he [Abraham] was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you are. If the Egyptians see you, and think, ‘She is his wife,’ they will kill me and let you live.” (Genesis 12:11-12).



Figure 11. Illumination for the Parasha Lech Lecha, folio 23r. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

This word panel is in the shape of a cathedral façade on top of the panel's words and floral loops. Two dragons interlace their necks at the center of the composition in front of a tree. The tail of the right dragon ends in two floral curls, with one curl featuring two dragon heads, one on top of the other. In front of the mouth of the lower dragon there is a small golden circle, a speech marker. The left dragon tail ends in a floral curl that culminates with a dragon biting a flower. Below the titles of the panel, there are decorated floral curls with a rabbit on the right-side curl facing left. The left curl depicts a grenade fruit. From the left side of the panel a floral stem extends towards the bottom of the folio wrapping the biblical text with a horizontal branch. On that branch a dog (on the left) faces a lion (on the right) with a speech marker between them. The *masoretic* text in the upper and lower margin is written in rows and in the form of a roset flower. The lower marginalia, represented by the horizontal stem and the interacting animals, along with the *masoretic* texts guardrail the biblical text. The columns of the Hebrew biblical

text (center) and the philosophical text (left) are written in triangular shapes mirroring the roof of the cathedral accentuating the symmetry of the composition. A vertical symmetry line extends from the vertex of the central roof peak through the interlaced dragon throats to the vertex of the Hebrew biblical text column. The Aramaic biblical text column is written in circular shape.

Interpretation. The shape of the panel in the form of a cathedral represents God's altar building. The Covenant between God and Abraham is represented by the interlaced dragons' necks, while the future of the Covenant is alluded to by the oracular vision of the interlaced dragon heads and the dragons in the floral tails. The promised land of Canaan is represented by the grenade, a fruit from this region mentioned many times in the Scriptures in reference to Canaan. The rabbit (reproductive fertility) represents the descendants of Abraham, as is written "I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring too can be counted" (Genesis 13:16). A rabbit running towards a grenade, alludes to the connection of Abraham's clan with the land of Canaan stated in the Covenant.

The exile from Egypt is foretold in this section of Genesis, as ultimately Abraham and his clan were expelled from Egypt, after a Pharaoh's decree, as is written "Pharaoh sent for Abram and said, 'What is this you have done to me! Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?'" (Genesis 12: 18). The speech marker between the lion (representing Abraham's clan) and the dog (representing Pharaoh¹³⁰) might allude to Pharaoh's command of the expulsion. The speech marker between the dog and the lion clearly indicates a confrontation between these figures transmitting the tension between them, perhaps yelling at each other. Alternatively, the dog might be alluding to Pharaoh's sinful relation with Sarah. Moreover, the alignment between the

¹³⁰ Pointed ear dogs were a royal symbol in Pharaoh's court.

rabbit in the upper register and the lion on the lower right side of the folio may indicate that these images refer to the same people.

Vayera

This weekly reading (Genesis 18:1–22:24) narrates the story of Abraham’s family.

Addresses the three messengers who announced Sarah’s childbirth, Abraham intercession with God to save the life of few pious people of the city of Sodom, Sodom and Gur subsequent destruction, and the escape of Lot, his wife, and two daughters from the destruction. After Lot's wife's death, Lot’s daughters laid with him “that we may maintain life through our father.” (Genesis 19:32); they gave birth to one son each, Moab and Ben-Ammi, who will have a large progeny. Sarah gave birth to Issac when Abraham was 100 years old. Hagar and her son were outcasted, but a God’s angel saved them from famine and thirst. The reading culminates with the binding of Issac.

Description of the word panel. The word panel for *Veyiera* is shown in the folio 32v, in Figure 12, featuring the first word, *veyirah* (“and He saw” in Hebrew). This word panel is in the shape of a castle façade. On top of the Hebrew word a big lion is its tongue, depicted as a knife, inside the mouth of the cub lion. A dragon on the lower right corner of the panel is watching this scene, and from its tail emerges a floral stem. The stem ends with another dragon head; there is a speech marker next to the mouth of both dragons. Below the panel there are two coats of arms. This folio presents micrographic figures on the left corner of the lower margin including a petal flower and the French royal symbol of the *flor-de-lis*, including a catchword. The upper *masoretic* text culminates in an ornamental motif, and along with the lower horizontal stem and lower *masoretic* text guardrails the biblical text. The Hebrew biblical text column is written in

the shape of an inverted triangle flanked by two triangular coat of arms, producing an interlocked tessellation that conveys a visual balance to the lower left side of the composition.



Figure 12. Illumination for the Parasha Vayera, folio 32v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

Interpretation. This reading narrates three episodes related to resurrection, 1) Lot's daughters ensure the continuity of humankind, 2) A God's angel saves Hagar and her son Ishmael from death, and 3) A God's angel saves Abraham's son Issac from sacrifice. The depiction of the lion licking a lion cub refers to these resurrections. Moreover, the lion tongue in the shape of a knife alludes to Issac's sacrifice, as is written "And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son." (Genesis 22:10). The dragon, with its oracular vision, refers to the name Abraham gave to the site of the sacrifice (Abraham ended scarifying a ram) "And Abraham named that site *Adonai-yireh*, whence the present saying, 'On God's mount there is vision.'"

(Genesis 22: 14). Alternatively, a dragon's foresight might represent the future of the Covenant that was reiterated following Abraham's sacrifice. The two coat of arms¹³¹ refer to the lineage of Abraham descendants, Ishmael and Issac, as is written, "I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore." (Genesis 22:17).

Chayei Sarah

This weekly reading (Genesis 23:1–25:18) is about the events that happened following Sarah's death at the age of 127. Abraham buried Sarah and mourned her. Then, Abraham sent a servant to his kinfolks in Haran to look for a wife for Issac. The servant chose Rebecca, the maiden who offered water to him and his camels. Rebecca went to Canaan to meet Issac, and he fell in love with her. After the death of Sarah, Abraham married Keturah and had six more children. This reading is about couples, Abraham becomes a widow and mourns Sarah, Issac marries Rebecca, and Abraham marries Keturah.

Description of the word panel. The word panel for *Chayei Sarah* is shown in the folio 44v in Figure 13, featuring the first word, *veihu* ("and they were" in Hebrew). The panel has three circular sections, one per text title. On top of the biblical commentary, there is a stork facing right, looking at a coat of arms, while on top of the Hebrew biblical text section there is a smaller stork facing left, looking at a different coat of arms. Between the Hebrew and Aramaic circular panels there is a dragon with two heads, nibbling from their contour at the bottom of the circles.

¹³¹ Is possible that the coats of arms derived from the illuminator's imagination. For example, the diagonal strip of the left coat of arms is in the opposite direction of the diagonal strips of all 13th C English and French coat of arms.

The dragon is standing on its hind legs, presenting its belly to the reader. Below the biblical commentary circle, and against its contour, there is another dragon nibbling on the Hebrew panel frame. The page is framed by four coats of arms, one on each corner of the folio. There is a lion standing on top of the coat of arms on the lower right corner. The upper and lower *masoretic* texts guardrail the sacred text that is framed by the four coats of arms. The shape of the columns of the philosophical commentary (right) and Hebrew biblical text (center) feature an apex at their top, pointing to the standing storks. The Aramaic biblical text is written in the shape of a coat of arms.



Figure 13. Illumination for the Parasha Chayei Sarah, folio 44v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

Interpretation. The storks of this word panel may allude to the marital love of Abraham for Sarah, as is written “and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewile her.” (Genesis

23:3) and to the love of Issac for Rebecca. The double head dragon exposing its belly can be interpreted as the defeat (belly exposed) of extreme evil (double head dragon nibbling). The double-head dragon hanging from the biblical panel contours (Aramaic left and Hebrew center) might indicate the victory of the Scriptures in defeating evil.

Because the reading ends with listing the descendants of the six sons of Abraham and Keturah, the coats of arms might represent Abraham's descendants. The coat of arms in the upper left corner of the folio is of French origin corresponding to the province of Poitou. The upper right corner coat of arms is also French, from the Comte du Foix in the region of the Occitanie, close to the Pyrenees. The lower coats of arms seem to belong to individuals from Normandy who lived in England. The lion is on top of a coat of arms that belonged to the house of Daubini,¹³² perhaps related to an English surname Daubeney.

Toldot

This reading (Genesis 25:19–28:9) narrates the story of Issac and the generations that followed him, addressing Rebecca's difficulty to give birth to the twins Esau and Jacob ("two nations in your womb" Genesis 25:23). Esau was the first born, he became a good hunter and Issac's favorite, while Jacob dwelled in the tent and became Rebecca's favorite son. Esau sold his birth right to Jacob over a bowl of red lentils. Issac went to Gerar because there was drought in Canaan, he dug water wells but Issac's servants and the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled over water rights. Issac grew old and became blind. Rebecca deceived him by disguising Jacob as Esau, so Jacob would obtain Isaac's blessing of the first born.

¹³² Text Manuscript *Les Enluminures*. Retrieved from <https://www.textmanuscripts.com/medieval/armorial-in-french-264951>

Description of the word panel. The word panel for *Toldot* is shown in the folio 52v, in Figure 14, featuring the first word, *ele* (“these” in Hebrew). The word panel has three circular parts inside square frames, one for each text title. On top of the biblical commentary panel on the right there is a dragon with its neck interlaced in the circle's frame nibbling the frame and facing left towards the Hebrew biblical text. On top of the Hebrew panel there is a winged fox scratching its head, and on top of the Aramaic panel there is a stork with its beak inside the circular panel. On top of the Hebrew text and below the panel there is a lion facing left speaking (see speech marker) with a small dog placed on top of the Aramaic text. This folio has figurative micrography on the top margin in the shape of a turtle and on the bottom margin in the shape of a rose flower. The *masoretic* text along with the right vertical and lower horizontal stems guardrail the biblical text. The main scribe arranged the upper biblical text columns in the shape of circles (center and left), while the lower text columns are in the shape of triangles. The illuminator drew the images below the panel (dog, lion, and leaf) around the text, such that the triangular shaped texts point to these images and to the figures in the upper edges of the panel.

Interpretation. The dragon on the upper right panel represents the deception of the innocent and is probably a reference to Rebecca and Jacob's deception of Issac. The winged fox scratching its head represents the mockery and trickery that Jacob and Rebeccah incurred to Esau and Issac. The stork, that alludes to the love of Rebeccah for her son Jacob, is staring at a dog confronting a lion perhaps referring to the announced confrontation between the nations derived from Rebeccah's sons, Esau and Jacob, as it is written “Two nations are in your womb, Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other” (Genesis 25:23).



Figure 14. Illumination for the Parasha Toldot, folio 52v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

In this reading there are confrontations and pacts between parties, as in the case of Esau and Jacob at the selling of Esau's birth right, the herdsmen of Gerar and Issac's servants over water rights, and Issac and Jacob upon the blessing of the first born. The interacting dog and lion might represent such transactions. Where the lion represents the party in power, while the dog his foes.

Vayetzei

This weekly reading (Genesis 28:10–32:3) is about the journey of Jacob from Beer Sheva to his kinsfolk in Haran. Along the way, Jacob fell asleep and dreamed of a ladder connecting heaven and earth on which angels go up and down. When he woke up, God promised him that the land where he laid will be given to his descendants; Jacob pledged the building of a God's house there. Jacob worked for Laban to gain the hand of Rachel, but instead was given Leah, Rachel's oldest sister, for a wife. He worked seven more years to marry Rachel. Jacob had twelve

sons and one daughter from Leah, Bilah, Zilpa, and Rachel. After prospering in Haran for twenty years, Jacob left Haran with his clan. Laban went after Jacob, catching up with him in Gilead.

Description of the word panel. The word panel for *Vayetze* is shown in folio 60v in Figure 15, featuring the first word, *veyetze* (“and he left” in Hebrew) in a rectangular word panel, flanked by left and right vertical stems framing the text. On top of the right stem there is a pelican, staring right, away from the text. On top of the Hebrew word section there is a dog chasing a rabbit running towards the left margin. The vertical stems along with the *masoretic* texts in the upper and lower margins of the folio guardrails the biblical text. The main scribe laid out a symmetric composition of the Aramaic biblical text (left side) and philosophical text (right side), such that these texts end and start in triangular shaped columns, while the philosophical text is equally spread in three rows along the upper and lower margins. The overall composition is in equilibrium, with a pelican (upper right) balanced by a floral curl (lower left). The folio presents hand-written gloss with text and floral ornaments on the upper left corner.

Interpretation. The rabbit in this illumination alludes to Jacob as it is written that his progeny will be numerous like “the dust” of the earth” (Genesis 28:14). The chasing dog refers to Laban, representing the pursuit of Laban after Jacob, when Jacob decided to leave Haran as is written “So he [Laban] took his kinsmen with him and pursued him [Jacob] a distance of seven days, catching up with him in the hill country of Gilead.” (Genesis, 31:23). A pelican is perching on the top of a stem facing right, away from the dog-rabbit chase. The pelican symbolizes piety, but in this case, piety looks the other side. The long stem on the right side of the folio may represent the stairway of Jacob’s dream, as is written “He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky,” (Genesis 28:12) or “the gateway to heaven” (Genesis 28:17).



Figure 15. Illumination for the Parasha Vayetzai, folio 60v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms. 116)

Vayishlach

This weekly reading (Genesis 32:4–36:43) narrates the encounter of Jacob with his brother Esau, on the way to Canaan. Jacob sent a messenger with many gifts to encounter Esau ahead of him as he feared retaliation from his brother. Jacob dreamed about a fight with a God’s angel where one of his hips was taken out of its socket, but Jacob prevailed in the end. Jacob settled in Succot, where Schem, the son of King Hamor of the Hittites, took Dinah, Jacob’s daughter. The prince fell in love with Dinah, but Jacob’s sons avenge the honor of Dinah by killing and plundering. Jacob was angry at his sons.

Description of the word panel. The word panel for *Vayishlach* is shown in the folio 71v, shown in Figure 16, featuring the first word, *veishlach* (“and he send” in Hebrew). This image includes three word-panels, one for the biblical commentary in the shape of a window, and two

circular panels for the biblical text titles in Hebrew and Aramaic. The window panel has a floral background with a seven-petal golden flower. On top of the panel of the Hebrew title there is a dog chasing a rabbit; the rabbit stands on the Aramaic panel on the left and is staring at the dog behind him. The biblical commentary word panel is resting on the back of a dragon. The dragon has a speech marker next to its mouth and is facing the biblical text, in the direction of the rabbit hunt. The lower *masoretic* text culminates with an ornamented motif, and along with the upper *masoretic* text and right floral stem guardrail the biblical text. The figure of the triangular window is the specular reflection of the top text of philosophical commentary that culminates in the shape of an inverted triangle. The Aramaic biblical text column (upper left) also is written in the shape of an inverted triangle, flanking the Hebrew biblical text placed on the center top of the folio.



Figure 16. Illumination for the Parasha Vaishlach folio 71v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms. 116)

Interpretation. The fecund rabbit represents Jacob, as is written "I [God] will deal bountiful with you [Jacob] and make your offspring like the sand of the sea, so numerous to count" (Genesis 32:13). The dog represents the foes of Jacob, in this case Esau. The rabbit facing the dog is aware of the dog's threat, as was Jacob aware of Esau's menace implied by the fact that Jacob sent Esau many gifts ahead appearing before him to placate his possible wrath. The window shape of the word panel might represent the altar Jacob built in El-bethel as it is written "There he built an altar and named the site El-bethel, for it was there that God had been revealed to him when he was fleeing from his brother." (Genesis 35:7). The seven-petal flower might be a precursor of the seven branched lampstand -its design includes flowers and almond buds- placed in the Tabernacle.

A dragon with its oracular vision, is staring in the direction of the dog-rabbit chase, perhaps alluding to the distraught future of Jacob and his progeny resulting from the wrong doing of his sons to the people of King Hamor, as is written "Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, 'You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my men are few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed'." (Genesis 34:30).

Vayeshev

This weekly reading (Genesis 37:1–40:23) is about the story of the sons of Jacob once he settled in the land of Canaan, when Joseph, Jacob's youngest son, tended the flock of his brothers. On one occasion, Joseph told his brothers about his dreams, implying that he would rule over them.¹³³ Joseph's brothers hated him because he was their father's favorite and because

¹³³ Joseph dreams such as "There we were binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf stood up and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf." (Genesis 37:6). "Look, I

of his dreams. They plotted to kill Joseph, but Reuben, the oldest brother, suggested throwing him in a desert pit with no water. A caravan of Ishmaelites passed by and Judah, Jacob's fourth son, suggested giving Joseph to them. Joseph's brothers returned to Jacob stating that a beast killed Joseph; Jacob mourned him. Meanwhile, the Ishmaelites sold Joseph in Egypt, where he served in the house of Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh. Joseph oversaw Potiphar's house but was ultimately put in jail "where the king's prisoners were confined." (Genesis 39: 20). In jail, Joseph interpreted the dreams of other prisoners.

Description of the word panel. The word panel for *Vayeshev* is shown in the folio 82v shown in Figure 17, featuring the first word, *vayeshev* ("and he settled" in Hebrew). Behind the word panel of the biblical commentary, there is a beaver showing its tail and rear legs while the rest of its body is behind the panel. On top of this panel there is a pelican facing left. Next to it, on top of the Hebrew and Aramaic panel word panel there is a floral with three curls. In the first curl from the right there is a rabbit running left, in the second curl there is a lion facing left menacing a dog placed in the third curl. A floral stem extends from the lower right corner of the word panel up to the bottom of the folio. On top of the lower curl of the floral stem there is a standing stork staring at the rear body of the beaver. Below the Aramaic text, in the left corner of the folio there is a coat of arms. The lower *masoretic* text is enclosing the last phrase of the philosophical commentary and culminates in an ornamental motif and a rose flower. The upper and lower *masoretic* texts, along with the right vertical floral stem guardrail the biblical text. This folio presents a hand-written gloss next to the stork figure that stands next to the philosophical commentary, perhaps adding a note about it. The columns of the Hebrew biblical

[Joseph] have had another dream: And this time, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." (Genesis 37:9).

text (center) and philosophical commentary (right) are written in a triangular shape, pointing to their respective titles in the word panel.



Figure 17. Illumination for the Parasha Vayeshev folio 82v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms. 116)

Interpretation. The beaver might symbolize Joseph in the pit, as the beaver is running left entering a circular opening. The beaver was a symbol of gentleness¹³⁴ and innocence dedicated to God's commands, alluding to Joseph. In the upper register of the panel, a lion intercedes between a running rabbit and a dog, perhaps alluding to Judah's (the lion¹³⁵) intervention to save Joseph (the rabbit) from the grim fate imposed by the rest of Jacob's sons (represented by the dog). The pelican, (piety and compassion) is staring at the running rabbit indicating that the

¹³⁴ Morrison, p. 19, Aberdeen Bestiary folio 11r, and Rowland, p. 36.

¹³⁵ The symbol of the tribe of Judah was a lion.

rabbit got compassion and its life was saved.¹³⁶ The standing stork represents filial piety, probably referring to the sentiment that Jacob had for Joseph. The coat of arms might refer to the offsprings of Judah, listed at the end of this reading in Genesis 38:1-6. The coat of arms of this folio was the fruit of the illuminator's imagination, as it has a mix of design patterns of different French coats of arms.

Miketz

This weekly reading (Genesis 41:1–44:17) narrates the story of Joseph in Egypt. Pharaoh dreamed with seven fat cows eaten by seven thin cows, and seven healthy sheaths of grain eaten by seven frail sheaths of grain. Joseph was brought out of prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. The dreams were a premonition of the future, when after seven years of bounty will come seven years of famine. Joseph proposed a plan for storing the grain surplus of the first seven years and distributing it during the following seven years to overcome the predicted famine. Pharaoh made Joseph vizier of Egypt, as is written “You [Joseph] shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I [Pharaoh] be superior to you.” (Genesis 41: 40). After seven years of bounty followed by seven years of famine, only Egypt in the whole world had food. Joseph's brothers went to Egypt to ask for food. Joseph remembered his own dreams and recognized his brothers. He treated them harshly and requested that the youngest brother, Benjamin, be brought to Egypt. Joseph sent his brothers back to Canaan with food and Simeon stayed as hostage. Benjamin is brought to Egypt, and Joseph serves his brothers a banquet.

¹³⁶ The facing of an animal that carries powers -healing, piety, etc.,- is indicative whether the power will reach the person/animal stared at. See for example of the caladrius healing bird, when a person was ill such a bird was brought in the presence of the sick; if the bird faced them, cure was on its way, otherwise it was believed that the sick would die. See Morrison, p. 44.

Description of the word panel. The word panel for *Miketz* is shown in the folio 91r in Figure 18, featuring the first word, *vayei* (“and it was” in Hebrew). Behind the Hebrew panel there is the rear body of a lion following a running dog towards the left side of the folio. Three floral stems emerge from the lower border of the panel framing the Hebrew, Aramaic, and biblical commentary texts. A long stem on the left side of the folio, branches up to frame the biblical commentary text, on this upper left branch there is a fish (possibly a carp). On the right upper corner of the folio there is a coat of arms. The lower *masoretic* text is written in three rows and culminates in a vertical line of text and a rose flower. The upper and lower *masoretic* texts, along with the left horizontal fish and the upper right coat of arms guardrail the biblical text. The column of the Hebrew biblical text is written in the shape of an inverted triangle.



Figure 18. Illumination for the Parasha Miketz folio 91r. Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

Interpretation. This reading narrates the success of Joseph, “because God was with him, and whatever he [Joseph] did God made successful.” (Genesis 40:23), on managing difficulties. The lion, a regal symbol, represents Joseph who was second to Pharaoh, while the dog, a symbol of oppression, might represent the famine that afflicted Egypt and Joseph's brothers.¹³⁷ During the Middle Ages, the carp fish was a luxury food in monasteries and castles, and in this illumination might allude to the feast that Joseph prepared for his brothers. The coat of arms symbolizes Jacob's progeny through Joseph and his brothers. The depicted coat of arms corresponds to an 13th C English coat of arms.¹³⁸ The shape of the panel is peculiar, and it is the specular image of the map of France in the 13th C.

Vaygash

This weekly reading (Genesis 44:18–47:27) narrates the story of the reencounter between Joseph and his brothers when they bring Jacob's youngest son, Benjamin, to Egypt. Joseph demanded the presence of Benjamin to release the hostage brother, Simon, and provide more food for the clan of Jacob. Judah pleaded to Joseph the return of Benjamin to Canaan, offering himself as slave instead. Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and urged them to come to Egypt with Jacob, their children, and wives. The brothers went back to Canaan with food and narrated all what happened to Jacob. Jacob went back to Egypt and had a vision where God announced to him that “Joseph's hand shall close your eyes” (Genesis 46:4). The reading ends with the list of the lineages of Jacob's clan.

¹³⁷ Joseph brothers acknowledged that they tried to kill Joseph, and that the famine and harsh treatment they received in Egypt was a punishment of their wrong doing, as is written “They [the brothers] said to one another, “Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother [Joseph], because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why this distress has come upon us.” In Genesis 42:21.

¹³⁸ Retrieved from <https://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/archivesandmanuscripts/author/alicewhichelow/>

Description of the word panel. The word panel for *Vaygash* is shown in folio 102v, in Figure 19, featuring the first word, *vaygash* (“and he approached” in Hebrew). The rectangular word panel is decorated with florals of knotgrass plants. This is a non-historiated word panel, while the panel section corresponding to the title of the philosophical commentary was omitted. The Aramaic biblical text surrounds the word panel with text on the upper, right, and lower sides written in a smaller script than the Aramaic text in the upper left column. The lower *masoretic* text is written in four rows and culminates with a vertical line of text and a rose flower. The upper and lower *masoretic* texts, along with the right vertical floral stem guardrail the biblical text. The column of the Hebrew biblical text (top center) is written in the shape of an inverted triangle.



Figure 19. Illumination for the Parasha Vaygash folio 102v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms. 116)

Interpretation. The knotgrass plant symbolizes resilience, possibly referring to the resilience of Joseph brothers. Yet this plant appears in the panels of all other readings. It is notorious the difference between this very simple word panel, with the other highly historiated panels. It is possible that this is because this reading is mainly a recount of events in the previous readings.

Vayechei

This weekly reading (Genesis 47:28–50:26) narrates the death of Jacob, when he was 147 years old and after being in Egypt for seventeen years. Before dying he called Joseph and requested to be buried in Canaan. Joseph brought his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to be blessed by Jacob, but the first-born blessing went to Ephraim, the youngest son. Both sons will be part of the covenant between Jacob and God. Jacob's life was recounted, and upon his death, Jacob blessed each of his sons and foresaw their fate; Benjamin will become ferocious like a wolf; Zebulun will dwell by the seashore; Issachar will become strong like a strong-boned donkey; and Judah will be feared "Judah is a lion's whelp" (Genesis 49:9). Jacob rebuked Reuben, Levi, and Simeon because of previous wrongdoing. Jacob requested to be buried along with his ancestors. Joseph and a procession of Egyptians dignitaries along with Jacob's sons, buried Jacob in Canaan. Joseph died at age 110 and was also buried in Canaan.

Description of the word panel. The word panel for the *Vayechei* is shown in folio 111r in Figure 20, featuring the first word, *vayechei* ("and he lived" in Hebrew). On top of the Aramaic word panel, on the right side, there is a dragon facing left with a speech marker inside its mouth, another dragon is standing on the biblical commentary panel on the left side of the folio. A covered eagle is standing below the Hebrew word panel, facing right. Next to it a large dog is eating a small dog, while a pelican is biting the dog. The tail of the dog ends on a floral curl on

the lower left. On the top margin there are two coats of arms, on the right and left corners of the folio. The lower *masoretic* text is written in four rows and culminates with a vertical line of text. The upper *masoretic* text is written in three rows and also culminates with a vertical line of text. Both *masoretic* texts (upper and lower) along with the upper coats of arms and the lower right vertical floral stem guardrail the biblical text. The upper and lower columns of the Hebrew biblical text (center) are written in the shape of triangles pointing to the image of the covered eagle at the center of the composition.



Figure 20. Illumination for the Parasha Vaychei folio 111r. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms. 116)

Interpretation. This reading is the recount of Jacob's family life that was characterized by confrontations, such as Reuben vs. Jacob concerning Reuben and his relationship with Jacob's concubine Bilah, and Levi and Simon vs. Jacob about Jacob's questioned authority in the

massacre of Schem. Two confronting dragons of distinct colors might symbolize these conflicts. The theme of confrontation is reinforced by the depiction of a large dog eating a small dog, that it was a symbol of unnatural disorder and social chaos, as in the Latin proverb *canis caninam non est* ("a dog does not eat the flesh of a dog"). Issues of moral chaos were also addressed by Jacob when he foresaw his sons' fate. A pelican (piety) biting the large dog alludes to an effort to "stop" moral and social chaos. The eagle, symbolizing power and renewal,¹³⁹ faces to the other side of the moral chaos scene, ignoring it. It also has his mighty body covered, rendering a sense of "unpowered" eagle. The left coat of arms is possibly of French origin, while the right coat is not identifiable.

General Trends in the Iconography of the Book of Genesis

A recurring scene throughout these twelve illuminations are either an animal hunt (present in four illuminations) or a confrontation between two creatures (present in three illuminations). In three out of four hunting scenes, the rabbit is the chased animal. Even for texts with distinctive narratives rich in imagery -such as the dreams of Jacob, the dreams of Joseph, and Noah's ark- their illuminations recurred to a hunt or confrontation, while omitting the distinct narrative. It is possible that the repertoire of the illuminator was limited and including an animal hunt in many illuminations was a pragmatic choice. But it is also possible that these chases alluded to the persecutions that Jews suffered during the 13th C in France, Spain, and England. Accordingly, the image of a large dog eating a small dog (folio 111r, in Figure 20) might refer to the victory of

¹³⁹ Morrison, p. 89.

the strong over the weak dog alluding to the fear and oppression that weakened Jewish communities experienced when the Rothschild Pentateuch manuscript was illuminated.

Symbols signifying speech and other interactions are present in five illuminations of the Book of Genesis, such as in the marginal image of the story of Noah in folio 12r in Figure 10, where a young hybrid (representing Noah's son Ham) is sticking its tongue to an older hybrid (Noah). This mocking scene is a visual translation of the intent of the biblical text, "Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father nakedness and told his two brothers outside.... their [other brothers] faces were turned the other way, so that they did not see their father's nakedness." (Genesis 9:22-23). This passage implies that Ham was irreverent as he saw and talked about his father's nakedness. The mocking scene of the marginalia addresses the implied insolence towards the father¹⁴⁰ and it becomes an expressive tool to convey the emotional tension of the text.

Coat of arms are frequent images in the Book of Genesis, appearing twelve times throughout seven illuminations. Most of the identified coats of arms in the Book of Genesis are of French origin. As it was customary in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, these emblems corresponded to the kings and lords that rule the Jews;¹⁴¹ perhaps to assert their loyalty to the ruler. However, many coats of arms in the illuminations seem to be imaginary as they do not follow the heraldic design rules prevalent in 13th C. For example, the diagonal strips of the coat of arms in the reading of Issac's binding is in a direction contrary of the stipulated rules -strips were from left to right; or a coat of arms might present mixed patterns corresponding to different heraldic

¹⁴⁰ Contrary to fifth commandment "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12).

¹⁴¹ Therese and Mendel Metzger *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*, Chatwell Books, Inc. 1982), 43.

symbols.¹⁴² It seems that coats of arms were used as an iconographic element to signify lineage instead of signaling a particular family.

By the thirteenth century Jews were not allowed to have a recognized coat of arms and only some prominent families (i.e., community leaders, rabbis, and physicians) used emblems; perhaps to emulate the manners and habits of mainstream nobility. It is possible that the depiction of coat of arms in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts alluded to the patron's high social status. Reference to ancestry is pervasive in Jewish tradition.¹⁴³ Since biblical times, in the first census of the Israelites freed from bondage, the ancestry of the families of each tribe were recorded (Numbers 1: 1-3). So, the inclusion of fictitious coats of arms might be in response to a tradition of displaying lineage, identity, and continuity through time.

A mirror, symbol of lust and vanity, is included in two illuminations of the Book of Genesis that address body nakedness as a shameful condition. In the reading of *Bereshit*, (first reading) a mirror refers to the moment when Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise and became aware of their nakedness, and in the reading of *Noah* (second reading), when Noah was drunk and naked in his tent and was discovered by his son, Ham. In both cases nakedness was not a deliberate act, unlike the act of concealing it. For Adam and Eve, it is written "Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths." (Genesis 3:7), and for Noah¹⁴⁴ it is written "But Shem and Japheth took a cloth, placed it against both their backs and, walking backward, they covered

¹⁴² Retrieved from <https://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/archivesandmanuscripts/author/alicewhichelow/>

¹⁴³ Since antiquity the names of ancestors have been recorded in documents related to life cycle events such as marital contracts, and birth and death certificates.

¹⁴⁴ Noah planted the first vineyard, and it is possible that he was not aware of the effect of wine.

their father's nakedness; their faces were turned the other way, so that they did not see their father's nakedness." (Genesis 9: 23).

In all the illuminations of the Book of Genesis there are floral stems and panel backgrounds with floral and foliage patterns. These motifs repeat throughout the Book, except for the image of a grenade fruit that only appears in the illumination of the reading of *Lech Lecha*. While grenades are a Mediterranean crop, the other plants included in the illuminations are from Northern Europe, such as knotgrass, oaks, and maples. The foliage of the panel backgrounds reminiscences the moresque art prevalent in northern Spain during the 13th C.

It is eloquent that the first and last illustrations of the Rothschild Pentateuch's Book of Genesis depict interconnected worldviews. The illumination of the first reading, *Bereshit*, depicts an environmental interdependent web of florals, animals, hybrids and stems, represented by the Garden of Eden. The illumination of the last reading, *Vayeichei*, depicts an intertwined world view that resulted from human interactions, such as hatred, ambition, and power. Both illuminations share a similar composition, with a bird in the center and two dragons flanking the upper area of the word panel, on the left and right sides. The dragons of *Bereshit* look away from each other and from the panel, guarding the fragile harmony of the Garden of Eden from intruders. The dragons of the reading *Vayeichei* confront each other, perhaps referring to the clashes of the human web represented by Jacob's life addressed in this reading.

The illumination program of the Book of Genesis omitted the incorporation of Jewish mythical animals -Leviathan, Ziz, and Behemoth- prevalent in other Hebrew manuscripts and literature of the period. Although omitted by the illuminator, the micrography scribe, Elijah ben Yehiel, incorporated micrographic images of Ziz as shown in folio 112v in Figure 21a, and the Leviathan serpent as shown in folio 35r in Figure 21b. This observation suggests that perhaps the

illuminator and micrography scribe used different iconographic sources and models, where the first was inspired by widespread images from bestiaries, while the second by Jewish folk tales. The present iconographic analysis shows that the illuminations of the Book of Genesis are associated with their corresponding narrative allegorically. The Rothschild Pentateuch's Book of Genesis incorporates iconographic elements derived from Latin medieval bestiaries to depict narratives of the Hebrew Bible, recurring to the animals' moral metaphors to represent the ethical dilemmas of the biblical text.

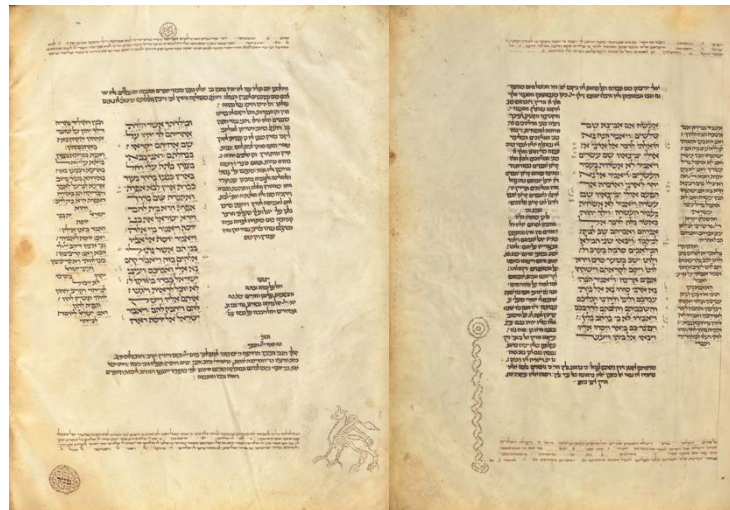


Figure 21. (a) Micrographics. Ziz, f 112v. (b) Leviathan (serpent), f 35r. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

Was the allegorical iconography of the Rothschild Pentateuch's Book of Genesis common to other manuscripts of the same period? Or the allegorical approach was unique to the Rothschild Pentateuch? The next chapter presents a comparison of the iconography of four biblical stories of the Book of Genesis among different contemporary Hebrew and Latin manuscripts.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ROTHSCHILD PENTATEUCH'S BOOK OF
GENESIS ILLUMINATIONS WITH CONTEMPORARY MANUSCRIPTS

The iconography of the Rothschild Pentateuch's Book of Genesis was almost exclusively based on creatures recorded in Latin bestiaries of the 13th C. The goal of this chapter is to explore whether this approach was unique to the Rothschild Pentateuch or common to other illuminated Latin or Hebrew manuscripts of the period (between 1250 and 1350) that addressed the narratives of the Book of Genesis. The comparison is performed for four stories, The Creation, Noah's Story, Binding of Issac, and Joseph's Dream. These stories were chosen because of their plot development. Additionally, except for Issac's sacrifice story, the narratives are centered on non-anthropomorphic themes which lend themselves to the use of explicit imagery rather than allegorical representations. Building on the preceding analysis of the Book of Genesis illuminations, this section further examines iconographic elements by comparing their use in contemporary Latin and Hebrew manuscripts.

The Creation

The Creation is the weekly reading from Genesis 1:1-6:8. The image of the Creation depicted in the Sarajevo Haggadah¹⁴⁵ (Spain, Catalunya, ca. 1350) is shown in Figure 22.

¹⁴⁵ A Haggadah is a liturgical Hebrew book, read during the festival of Passover, that narrates the story of the liberation of the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage during the time of the Pharaoh. The Sarajevo Haggadah is housed in Sarajevo, Zemaljski Museum, MS1.



Figure 22. Sarajevo Haggadah, 1350. Left, folio 1v, right folio 2r. Natl. Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Ref# 779)

The figure shows each day of the creation, captured in a frame, starting from the upper right¹⁴⁶ with an image for the status of the cosmos before the Creation when “the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water” (Genesis 1:2). The separation between light and darkness (day one) is depicted in the second upper right frame. The formation of Earth and Sky, in day two, is represented in the lower right frame, and so on. The images corresponding to the days of the creation are enclosed in blue and white half circles, and as the creation advances day by day (light/dark, earth-seas/sky, plants, stars, fish, terrestrial animals, and man), new creatures are incorporated to the pictures. The last creation day frame (seventh frame in the figure) has the complete creation. A “making God” is represented by golden rays between the Earth and the Sky. The color palette of these illuminations is dominated by vermillion, blue, white, and green. These illuminations explicitly

¹⁴⁶ In Hebrew reading and writing is from right to left.

describe the Creation process, unlike the allegorical relationship between image and text of the Rothschild Pentateuch.

Another illumination addressing the Creation is on the Crusader Bible ¹⁴⁷ (Paris, France, 1244-1254), of which the first four days are shown in Figure 23.



Figure 23. Crusader's Bible, 1340, folio 1r. First 4 days of Creation. Morgan Library New York (MS M.638)

This manuscript was written in Latin, Persian, and Judeo-Persian, and contains miniatures of Hebrew Bible texts. The first four creation days (light/dark, earth-seas/sky, plants, and starts) are presented in consecutive frames. The creation is confined to a circular earth, framed by a gothic church-like structure. The first frame (upper left) for the creation of light and darkness is rendered in the allegory of Heaven and Hell, with God as the Son in the center. The creations in the following five days (not shown here), are explicitly depicted as well as the anthropomorphic figure of the making God as the Son. The blue is the dominating color, followed by vermillion

¹⁴⁷ Housed in the Morgan Library and Museum. Manuscript MS M.638

and green; the illuminations are heavily gilded. Although some elements of the creation are presented explicitly (plants, animals, man, and stars) Christological allegories render the Creation story as a moralizing one. Instead, the Rothschild Pentateuch illumination of the Creation story uses a visual allegory to describe the Garden of Eden without presenting a moral “lesson” out of the narrative.

Noah’s Story

The story of Noah (from the weekly reading of *Noah*, Genesis 6:9 -11:32) includes three main stories, the great flood that destroyed all people on earth but Noah and his family, the building of the ark to save humans and animal species, and Noah’s drunkenness. The illustrations for Noah’s story are as diverse as these narratives. The North French Hebrew Miscellany¹⁴⁸ (Amiens, France, 1277) is a Hebrew compendium of biblical and other texts. In it the Noah story is depicted when the dove is returning with an olive branch after checking whether the flood had receded, Figure 24. A house-like ark on top of a hill (Mount Ararat) is enclosed in a circular golden frame. A raven¹⁴⁹ standing on the roof of the ark is scouting a returning dove from a tree (presumably on dry land). Noah is extending his arm to receive the branch, a sign that the flood has ended. The predominant colors of the illustration are blue, green, and tonalities of vermillion. The circular frame is in gold. This illumination explicitly describes the biblical narrative of a dove looking for a sign of the end of the flood. However, the image is isolated and in a different folio than the text. Although the image of the Northern French Hebrew Miscellany eloquently represents the story of the flood, it is detached from its text. Unlike the Rothschild Pentateuch, that includes a visual allegory to represent the tension between Noah and his son that resulted

¹⁴⁸ Housed at the British Library, Manuscript MS 11639.

¹⁴⁹ In the Middle Ages, one of the many meanings of a raven was a creature that bridged life and death.

from Noah's drunkenness, in which images (of the dragon nibbling a coat of arms on top of the panel and the two confronting hybrids at the bottom) and text are integrated.



Figure 24. North French Hebrew Miscellany, 1277, folio 521r. Noah's Ark. British Library, London (Add MS 11639)

An illustration of Noah's ark is included in the frontispiece for the Book of Genesis of the Schocken Bible¹⁵⁰ (Lake Constance, Germany, 1300) shown in Figure 25. The illustration contains 46 scenes of the book of Genesis placed in individual circular frames around the Hebrew title of the Book (*Bereshit*). In the fourth image from the upper right, the ark is placed on top of a hill (Mount Ararat) at the time of the flood, depicting its structure as described in the biblical text. The predominant colors are red, blue, and white; the circular frames and title are in gold. Noah's ark image explicitly illustrates the description of the biblical text, but unlike the Rothschild Pentateuch illumination, here it is detached from its corresponding text.

¹⁵⁰ Housed at the Schocken Library, Jerusalem MS 14840.



Figure 25. Schocken Bible, 1300, folio 1v. Noah's Ark (4th image from top right). Schocken Institute for Jewish Research, Jerusalem (MS14940)

Another illumination for the story of Noah can be found in the Golden Haggadah¹⁵¹ (Barcelona, Spain, 1320) and shown in Figure 26. Here the illuminator depicted the drunkenness of Noah after the flood. The image depicts two sons of Noah, one of whom is placing a blanket on Noah's naked body. They are facing away from him to avoid seeing his nakedness (as is stated in the biblical text). The third character on the right of the composition is Noah harvesting the grapes, referring to the cause of Noah's nakedness. The predominant colors are vermillion, blue, and green; the background of the miniature is in gold. The illumination of Noah's nakedness and the protective attitude of two of his sons (who later will be blessed) explicitly follows the biblical narrative. Unlike the illumination of the Rothschild Pentateuch that uses a visual allegory to address the tension between the mocking son and Noah, the Golden Haggadah illuminator chose to focus on the virtuous sons.

¹⁵¹ Housed at the British Library MS Add 27210.



Figure 26. The Golden Haggadah, 1320, folio 3v. Noah's drunkenness. British Library, London (Add MS 27210)

Binding of Issac

The image of the binding of Issac (from the weekly reading of *Vayera*, Genesis 18:1–22:24) depicted in the North French Hebrew Miscellany¹⁵² (Amiens, France, 1277) is shown in Figure 27. The image explicitly shows Issac, Abraham, and the angel of God when Abraham is about to sacrifice Issac. The three characters are very expressive, the reader clearly sees child Issac's submission, Abraham's surprise and obedience, and the angel's determination by pointing to a ram behind a bush ready for the sacrifice. The predominant colors are vermillion, blue, and green; only the circular frame of the miniature is in gold. The image is descriptive, faithful to the biblical text, while the figures are very expressive adding a layer of emotions to the biblical narrative. However, this image is isolated and detached from the biblical text; unlike the

¹⁵² Housed at the British Library, Manuscript MS 11639.

Rothschild Pentateuch, in which the allegorical depiction of the Binding of Issac is closely integrated to the text.



Figure 27. The North French Hebrew Miscellany, 1277, folio 521v. British Library, London (Add MS 11639)

An illustration of the Binding of Issac depicted in the Regensburg Pentateuch¹⁵³ (Regensburg, Germany, 1300) is shown in Figure 28. The manuscript was written in Hebrew and contains the Pentateuch, supplemental readings, and passages from the Book of Jeremiah. The image explicitly shows the moment when Abraham is about to sacrifice Issac. Issac is a tender baby, looking away from Abraham, while Abraham is facing the angel of God, depicted as a hand emerging from a cloud next to a bird. The ram, to be scarified instead of Issac, is shown next to a bush. This framed composition is next to an image that could correspond to the reading that follows Issac's Binding, Chayei Sarah, narrating the death of Sarah. These compositions are

¹⁵³ The Regensburg Pentateuch is housed in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, MS 180/52.

offered sequentially, as in a cartoon-like board script, prompting readers' reflection on the cause of Sarah's death.¹⁵⁴ The dominant colors are blue and green, followed by Abraham's vermilion tunic. The scene follows the biblical text, while the body postures of the figures enhance the dramatical aspect of the narrative. The God's angel is represented by an arm, avoiding a figurative image of a God's related being. This image is on the same folio as the biblical text, and unlike the illumination of the Rothschild Pentateuch, explicitly depicts the biblical narrative of the Binding of Issac and beyond.



Figure 28. The Regensburg Pentateuch, 1300, folio 18v. Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Ms. 180/52)

An illustration of the Binding of Issac included in the Bird's Head Haggadah¹⁵⁵ (Mainz, Germany, 1300) is shown in Figure 29.

¹⁵⁴ The Talmud states that when Sarah learn about Issac's binding, she got very depressed and died.

¹⁵⁵ The Bird Head Haggadah is housed in The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, MS 180/57.



Figure 29. The Bird's Head Haggadah, 1300, folio 4v. Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Ms. 180/57)

This Hebrew liturgical book for Passover depicts Abraham, baby Issac, a God's angel, and a ram. Issac and Abraham have both a bird head, Issac is facing Abraham when the angel stops his arm, ready to sacrifice Issac while pointing to a ram behind Abraham. Abraham is brandishing a sword instead of a knife. The dominant colors of the illustration are green and white. The word *hakedah* (binding in Hebrew) is written next to the illustration. Although human faces are avoided and replaced by a bird's head,¹⁵⁶ the scene explicitly shows Issac's sacrifice according to the biblical text and is also clarified by the word written next to the image. This explicit image contrasts with the allegorical image of Issac's Binding involving a resurrecting lion and its cub.

Joseph's Dreams

The image of the Joseph's dreams (from the weekly reading *Vayeshev*, Genesis 37:1–40:23) depicted in The Golden Haggadah¹⁵⁷ (Barcelona, Spain, 1320) is shown in Figure 30.

¹⁵⁶ This was an approach to avoid fully representing humans.

¹⁵⁷ Housed at the British Library, Manuscript MS 11639.

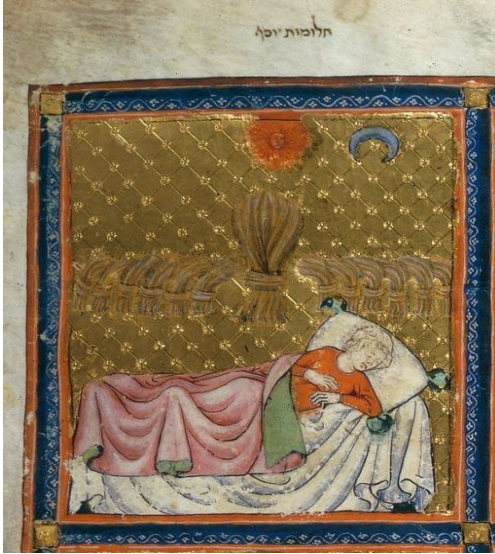


Figure 30. The Golden Haggadah, 1320. Joseph's dream, folio 5v. British Library, London (Add MS 27210)

The image shows a sleeping Joseph laying on a bed, on top a large wheat sheaf is flanked by smaller twelve wheat sheaves (six on each side),¹⁵⁸ and further up there is an image of the sun and the moon addressing Joseph's second dream where "the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." (Genesis 37:9). The background of the miniature is in gold, and the dominant colors are white, pink, and vermillion. The image follows the biblical text with some creative licenses, such as the number of wheat sheaves and omission of the eleven stars. Nonetheless, this image is explicit and non-allegorical, unlike the composition of the Rothschild Pentateuch, that allegorically depicts Joseph being thrown in a pit.

¹⁵⁸ This image is in accordance with the verse "There we were binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf stood up and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf." (Genesis 37:7). The biblical text does not specify the number of sheaves, but the illustrator included 12, probably referring to Joseph's 10 brothers, his mother and father.

A similar image of Joseph lying in bed and dreaming can be found in the Sarajevo Haggadah¹⁵⁹ (Barcelona, Spain, 1350) shown in Figure 31.



Figure 31. Sarajevo Haggadah, 1350. Joseph's dream, folio 11v. Natl. Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Ref# 779)

Joseph is surrounded by his dreams, on the left side of the miniature there are eleven wheat sheaves¹⁶⁰ bowing to a large one, and on top of Joseph's image the sun, the moon, and eleven stars are depicted. The dominant colors are blue and white. The stars and sun are in gold. The image explicitly follows the biblical text, unlike the allegorical representation of the Rothschild Pentateuch.

As was demonstrated in this analysis, the compositions of illuminated manuscripts contemporary to the Rothschild Pentateuch, explicitly describe the biblical narratives. In some cases, the illuminations showed creative elements or moralizing messages. But most likely, readers must have been certain of the biblical story by looking at their corresponding image. This

¹⁵⁹ Housed at Bosnia and Herzegovina National Museum, Sarajevo.

¹⁶⁰ Probably referring to his 11 brothers including Benjamin, the youngest brother that was not born at the time of this dream.

is a striking contrast with the illuminations of the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch, where the meaning of the biblical story is suggested through allegories.

The choice of the illustration themes differed noticeably between the Rothschild Pentateuch and the other manuscripts. When comparing the illustrations for the Creation (Genesis 1:1 - 6:8), the theme of choice of the other contemporary manuscripts was the six days of creation, while the illumination of the Rothschild Pentateuch depicted the Garden of Eden. Although the depiction of the Garden followed the description of the text, it used allegories to do so. For example, the four rivers are exemplified by four stems extending from the word panel (see Figure 9), the tree of knowledge at the center is signaled by an owl, and the life blowing wind is represented by a blowing horn, while fantastic animals guard the Garden. The Rothschild Pentateuch depiction of the Creation focuses on the outcome of the six days of creation instead on the process of the Creation itself.

The illuminations for Noah's story (Genesis 6:9 - 11:32) varied, however the analyzed images focused on a particular moment of the story, either the ark on top of Mount Arat at the end or during the flood, or when Noah is discovered naked. In the Rothschild Pentateuch there is an allusion to Noah and his mocking son, but unless the reader was familiar with the biblical story it is unlikely that the image of the two confronting hybrids would be associated with the story of Noah, as this illumination lacks text-specific visual elements. Nonetheless, the illumination of the mocking son and father addresses the command of honoring the parents, precursing the fifth of the Ten Commandments.

The most striking contrast of the illumination programs for the Genesis stories, is for the image of the Binding of Isaac (Genesis 18:1–22:24). In the analyzed illuminations Abraham, Issac, and the angel of God (or his arm) are explicitly shown, while the sacrificial ram is either

pointed out or included in the image. The facial expressions of Abraham and Issac are also conveyed, even in the Birds' Head Haggadah where Abraham is facing (expecting?) God's signal, adding to the drama of the narrative. In the Rothschild Pentateuch this story is depicted by a lion resurrecting a cub; the unfulfilled Issac's sacrifice was demonstrated by the belief of the resurrecting power of lions, which symbolized Jesus Christ's resurrection in the Cross. There was no angel to prevent the sacrifice nor ram to sacrifice instead of Issac. Only readers familiar with the allegories of the animals included in bestiaries would be able to associate this image to the Binding of Issac.

Joseph dreams (Genesis 37:1–40:23) were explicitly shown in the comparison illuminations, with the depiction of Joseph lying in bed indicating that the additional images were his dreams. The images of his dreams also resembled the biblical text with the inclusion of one large sheaf (representing Joseph) and several small ones bowing to it, and his second dream with celestial bodies -the moon, the sun, and eleven stars. The illumination of the Rothschild Pentateuch has no direct allusion to Joseph's dreams, but to Joseph placed in a pit due to his brothers' hatred. This story is depicted by a beaver jumping behind the word panel into a pit-like form, a lion (the older brother Judah, who intercedes for Joseph's life) interceding between a dog (Joseph's brothers) and a rabbit (Joseph). Interpreting this illumination required a reader knowledgeable with Joseph's story and animals' allegorical meanings. Additionally, the choice of the theme for the illumination in the Rothschild Pentateuch differs from the common choice of the other contemporary manuscripts of Joseph's dreams.

All the comparison manuscripts but one, the Bird's Head Haggadah, include human figures (faces and body). In spite the Talmudic ruling from the year 250-400 AD, regarding the prohibition of representing human figures in religious contexts, its implementation depended on

communal religious leaders,¹⁶¹ resulting in many different interpretations of the law. In the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch there are no human figures, only human faces appear in the three hybrids (human and animal) in the first and second readings of the Book of Genesis. It seems that the patron and illuminator of the Rothschild Pentateuch applied a strict interpretation of the law, thus recurring to the lexicon of bestiaries and choosing themes within the weekly readings that minimized the presence of humans while highlighting the moral and ethical messages of the biblical stories.

The use of animals' allegories is not exclusive of the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch illumination program. The Ambrosian Bible¹⁶² (Ulm, Germany, 1236-1238) also presents illuminations based on the allegorical meaning of real and fantastic animals. However, in the Ambrosian Bible, animal heads are incorporated to human bodies in naturalistic settings closely describing the biblical text, such as in the prophecy of Isaiah 25:6 "God of Host will make on this mount, For all the peoples a banquet of rich viands, a banquet of choice wine..", depicted in the Feast of the Righteous in Paradise, folio 136r of the Ambrosian Bible, shown in Figure 32, lower half. Here the people's heads correspond to animals representing holy people, evangelists, and saints according to Latin and Muslim iconography.¹⁶³ The replacement of human faces with animal ones was adopted in other Hebrew manuscripts produced in southern

¹⁶¹ The flexibility of the implementation of this command is demonstrated in a chronicle from *Anglia Judaica, a document on the history and antiquities of the Jews in England*. This chronicle is regarding the use of the image of an animal in a seal for Jacob, son of Rabbi Moshe of London, ca. 1452. Is written "The Graven Image upon this Seal can't be thought a Breach of the Second Commandment; ... it is the Likeness of nothing that is in Heaven, Earth, or Water. Yet, supposing it were either a Lion, or a Gryphon, as it seems to be several Learned Jews assure me, that their Nation never observed That Prohibition so strictly, as Mr. Selden, and other great Men have imagined: and that they use all Kind of Animals upon their Seals, at Present. And even the Figure of a Star, which appears at the Head of This Seal, is allowable under some Restrictions." From *Anglia Judaica: or the history and antiquities of the Jews in England*. Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/bim_eighteenth-century_anglia-judaica-or-the-h_tovey-dblossiers_1738/page/185/mode/2up?q=jacob

¹⁶² The Ambrosian Bible is housed in the Milan Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Ms. B30 inf.

¹⁶³ Bezalel Narkis, p. 90.

Germany in the late 13th C¹⁶⁴ to avoid human figures' representations. It is possible then, that the illuminator of the Rothschild Pentateuch expanded the use of heads of animals and incorporated full-body creatures that represented moral values, developing visual allegories.



Figure 32. Ambrosian Bible, 1238, folio 136r. Top: Leviathan, Behemoth, and Ziz. Bottom: Feast of the Righteous in Paradise. Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan (MS B. 30-32 Inf).

The three fantastic animals of Jewish mythology –Leviathan, Ziz, and Behemoth represented the three realms of the Creation, the Leviathan (serpent/dragon/fish) corresponded to the sea, Ziz (bird) to the sky, and Behemoth (bull) to the earth.¹⁶⁵ Some illuminators incorporated these creatures in Hebrew manuscripts of the period, such as the figure of the Leviathan included in the North French Hebrew Miscellany¹⁶⁶ (Amiens, France 1277) to depict

¹⁶⁴ Examples of Hebrew manuscripts that incorporate animal heads are the Worms Mahzor (Minz, Germany, 1272; Natl. Library of Israel, MS. Heb. 4 781/1, prayer book), The Laud Mahzor (Southern Germany, 1290; Bodleian Library, Oxford Univ. MS. Laud Or.321, prayer book), and The Birds' Haggadah (Southern Germany, c. 1300; Natl. Library of Israel, MS. Heb. 180/57, Passover book).

¹⁶⁵ The Leviathan is mentioned in Isaiah, 27:1 and in the Zohar (Spain, late 13th C), Ziz in Psalms 80:14 and in rabbinical literature of the 4th C, and Behemoth is mentioned in the Book of Job 40:14–24. Their function was to keep the natural balance and harmony of God's Creation

¹⁶⁶ The North French Hebrew Miscellany is housed in the British Library, Add MS 11639.

the text in Job 40-41, shown in Figure 33, or the image of the three mythical animals in the Ambrosian Bible, shown in the top half of Figure 32. Despite the vast repertoire of real and fantastic animals in the illuminations of the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch, these creatures of the Jewish mythology were omitted.



Figure 33. North French Hebrew Miscellany, 1277. Left, Leviathan, folio 518v. Right, Behemoth, folio 519r. British Library, London (Add MS 11639)

The image of a rabbit chased by another animal, pervasive in the illuminations of the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch, was common in other contemporary Latin and Hebrew illuminated manuscripts but mainly appearing in the marginalia¹⁶⁷ of their folios. However, the iconographical meaning of a rabbit hunt differs for Latin and Hebrew manuscripts. In Latin manuscripts, rabbit hunts were included in playful scenes of animals, hybrids, and humans (called *drolleries*), it signified nobility,¹⁶⁸ and “world order.”¹⁶⁹ An example of a

¹⁶⁷ Marginalia refers to a single or group of figures in the empty spaces of the page around the area of the main text.

¹⁶⁸ Associated with small game hunting.

¹⁶⁹ Some marginalia feature the rabbit as the hunter; such scenes were viewed as an upside-down world.

drollery from the Rutland Psalter (England, 1260) is shown in Figure 34, where a rabbit riding an hybrid snail is trying to spear a dog riding on the shoulders of another rabbit. This image represented a “reverser order” of the world, as a rabbit confronts a dog.



Figure 34. Rutland Psalm, England, 1260. Drollery of a “reverse world order.” British Library, London (Add MS 62925)

The imagery of a rabbit hunt in Hebrew manuscripts was associated with narratives of oppression. In the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch rabbit hunts are associated with stories of threats, expulsion, or persecution, as in Figure 15, depicting the persecution of Jacob by his father-in-law, Laban. Unlike rabbit hunts in other contemporary Hebrew manuscripts that were usually placed on the margin of the folio, in the Book of Genesis hunting scenes are central to the illumination and placed inside the word panel or on its border. Examples of a rabbit running away from a dog can be seen in the marginalia of the Haggadah of Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain 1320) in Figure 35a, and in a prayer book, The Leipzig Mahzor (Southern Germany, 1310) in Figure 35b. The different meanings of a rabbit hunt according to Latin and Hebrew iconographies could reflect the balance of power prevalent in the 13th and 14th centuries with respect to European Jewish communities.



Figure 35. (a) Right. Barcelona Haggadah, 1320, folio 19v. British Library, London (Add MS 14761). (b) Left. Leipzig Mahzor, 1310, folio 31v. Bibliotheca Albertina, Leipzig Univ., Leipzig (Ms V1102).

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

El pasado es arcilla que el presente labra a su antojo. Interminablemente. (The past is clay that the present fashions at its will. Endlessly). Jorge Luis Borges: from the poem “Todos los ayeres, un sueño.” En *Los Conjurados* (1985).

The Rothschild Pentateuch was commissioned by Joseph Martil ben Joseph. Little is known about who he was or his whereabouts. The iconography, text, and provenance records included in the manuscript do not support the claim made by some scholars about the English origin of the patron. Instead, the abundant French elements in the manuscript, such as French royal emblems, portraits of King Phillips IV who ruled France during the period of the manuscript production, French coats of arms, and a page layout that was favored by French Jews are indicative of a possible French patron. It is possible that Joseph Martil ben Joseph was an inhabitant of the commune of Martel, a town founded in the 11th C in the region of the Occitanie, southwest France, as some medieval Jewish family names incorporated the name of their town. From the illumination program of the Rothschild Pentateuch, it is possible to infer that Joseph Martil was a lay man who needed visual cues to follow the weekly readings of the Pentateuch. Unlike other contemporary Hebrew manuscripts, the illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch are placed at the beginning of each reading section, instead of at the beginning of a chapter or Pentateuch's book.

The Rothschild Pentateuch's elaborated and extensive illumination program, along with the profuse use of gold, the dominance of expensive pigments, the depiction of many coats of arms, the use of thin parchment, and the fine binding of the manuscript signal to an affluent

patron. The illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch are characterized by decorated frames and backgrounds with elaborated designs, interacting and expressive figures, playful compositions with hybrids, animals, and fantastic creatures. The architectural images of the illuminations correspond to the Southern Romanesque style, characterized by rounded arches, trefoil windows, brick walls, pinnacles, and turrets. The manuscript features a wide range of colors -pink, red, orange, yellow, blue, cyan, green, brown, grey, black, and white. Every panel displays multiple colors, but vermillion and ultramarine blue predominate. Most illuminations are gilded, with few (about 10%) having silver instead.

The illuminator(s) of the Rothschild Pentateuch is unknown. However, from the choice of the iconography it can be inferred that the illuminator was knowledgeable of bestiaries and the moral dilemmas of the biblical narratives, deepening on the meaning of the stories beyond they mere description. From the French Gothic style of the illuminations and the omission of Jewish mythical animals, it is possible that the illuminator was a monk who worked in a monastic scriptorium or an artist of a secular workshop. The Rothschild Pentateuch could have been commissioned to one of these centers for manuscript production that used mainstream illustrations' model books, bestiaries, and herbaria, like some Hebrew manuscripts of the period that were illuminated in monasteries or secular workshops. For example, the Northern French Hebrew Miscellany (Amiens, 1277) was illuminated in a Parisian workshop or in the Abbey of St. Bertin in St. Omer, northeast France, while the Golden Haggadah (Barcelona, 1320-1330) was illuminated by non-Jewish artists in Catalonia, Spain. Moreover, the claim that the Rothschild Pentateuch was illuminated at a scriptorium or workshop also explains the claim that a second illuminator, possibly from the same workplace, could have produced the distinct image of the basilisk in folio 424v (Figure 8).

The illuminator of the Rothschild Pentateuch strictly followed the constraints set by the prohibition of the use of graven images in sacred books and was able to overcome the prohibition by using a vast repertoire of animals to compose the illuminations. These illuminations were inspired by real and fantastic animals catalogued in bestiaries of the period, in which animals were ascribed moral values. The illuminations depict the meaning of the biblical text using visual allegories that combine value-laden images, rather than using explicit imagery. The use of animals as metaphors to convey human-centered narratives is unique to the Rothschild Pentateuch, unlike in other contemporary illuminated Hebrew manuscripts, in which the illuminations explicitly addressed the biblical story, but human faces were replaced by animal heads or concealed.

Voice interactions of fantastic and real animals are denoted with speech markers between two facing figures. Unlike small golden circles included in floral stems, speech markers are small golden circles placed between the mouths of the figures, and they profusely appear in the manuscript's illuminations in relation to narratives of confrontation or dialog. Similarly, speech markers are often placed inside or next the open mouth of an isolated figure, probably indicating the figure's speech. These speech markers are an adaptation of the speech bubbles that were incipient in 13th C manuscripts of knight's stories and other adventure books.¹⁷⁰

When examining the illuminations in relation to their corresponding biblical story in the Book of Genesis, the meaning of the allegories emerges. The representation of the Creation focuses on the Garden of Eden with its four rivers, the tree of knowledge at its center, and the blowing wind of life, representing the outcome of the six days of God's labor instead the process

¹⁷⁰ For speech bubbles see *Iacobus de Voragine, Legenda aurea*, c. 1290. BL, f 122r, Stowe MS 49.

of creation, as most contemporary manuscripts do. The illumination of the story of Noah emphasizes its moral aspects, such as the violence and corruption of the inhabitants of earth that led to the massive flood, or Noah's son Ham disrespect which resulted in a curse upon Ham's progeny. The moral focus of Noah's illumination of the Rothschild Pentateuch contrasts with the depiction of Noah's ark, an image so pervasive in other contemporary Hebrew manuscripts. The iconography of the illuminations of the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch provides a visual idiom to convey emotions and ideas instead of faithful and explicit descriptions of the biblical texts.

The main cast of the Rothschild Pentateuch's iconographic repertoire are dragons, rabbits, dogs, lions, and pelicans set against a background of Romanesque-Gothic facades decorated with florals and tracery, and coats of arms. Occasionally, other characters join the main cast, such as storks, knights, maidens, and a mermaid. As it was customary in Latin and Hebrew manuscripts of the 13th and 14th centuries, these images usually inhabited the margins of the folio surrounding the written text. In some instances, these images complemented the text, made ridicule of powerful social players, or were merely entertainment for the readers. In Hebrew manuscripts, including the Genesis illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch, these images appear on the margins or in word panels, associated with narratives of oppression. These images not only addressed Genesis's biblical narratives but also became a visual commentary of contemporary events when considering the historical, social, and political contexts of Jewish life in late 13th C Europe. The divergence in the interpretation of the marginalia's iconography between Latin and Hebrew manuscripts also points to a difference in the function of the marginalia.

The omission of Jewish mythical animals in the illuminations of the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch, proposes a broader analysis about the cultural exchanges between mainstream and minority groups. The 13th C was characterized by a cosmopolitan and global society, and yet globalization reached up to certain aspects of society -such as technology and trade- while cultural expressions remained confined to their original group. Illuminators used model books and were trained in workshops that established artistic trends and repertoires of images for patrons to select from; in turn, patrons' preferences and expectations influenced these repertoires. Thus, the imagery tapestry of the 13th C was, in some way, dictated by the interplay of supply and demand. Although minorities' cultural expressions incorporated mainstream styles, this transfer was asymmetric ensuring the continuity of the dominant culture.

The Rothschild Pentateuch is a treasure chest in terms of its content, the mastery of the scribes, the figurative motifs of its micrography, the illuminations' imagery, its gilding and variety of colors, and the deployment of allegorical iconography that goes beyond the storytelling of the biblical text to address its moral, emotional, and ethical aspects. The comparative study of the iconography of the Book of Genesis of the Rothschild Pentateuch asserts its uniqueness and opens a window for further exploring the intersection of the cultures that coexisted in Europe during the 13th C.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: THE VIBRANT THIRTEEN CENTURY

On Government, Technology, and Social Class

The revolution in the dissemination of knowledge and manuscript production that occurred during the 13th C in Europe resulted from the economic and social transformations that characterized the transition from a feudal system of rural land tenure, into the establishment of urban centers. The feudal system, characterized by a peasantry class that contributed to a local economy and were obligated to and protected by a landlord, contrasted with the establishment of cities characterized by a social class that contributed to a regional economy under obligations and privileges specified by the city's charter.¹⁷¹ As a result, the forms of government changed from a centralized government loyal to a landlord, to a decentralized self-government system ruled by a city charter. The changes of the economy's scale and government organization impacted other areas of human activities.

Significant advancements in agriculture occurred during the 13th C, including three-crop rotation for maintaining soil fertility and reducing weeds' pressure, the use of heavy plows for digging into hard soils expanding the areas for cultivation, the adoption of vertical windmills for processing grain, and the improvement of watermills for pumping irrigation water.¹⁷² These new technologies increased crop yield and food security resulting in a significant population growth in Europe¹⁷³ and a high demand for manufactured items. Such demands incentivized trade and the development of new industries giving rise to a new social class formed by merchants and artisans, the bourgeoisie. The increase of trade between distant urban centers required the

¹⁷¹ Robert Brenner "The low Countries in the Transition to Capitalism," 169-241.

¹⁷² See Thomas Barnebeck Andersen P. Sandholt, and S. C. Volmar. "The heavy plow and the agricultural revolution in Medieval Europe," in *Journal of Development Economics*, 118 (2016) 133-149.

¹⁷³ By the end of the 13th century the population reached around 80 million, almost double the population in the year 1000. Growth rate was not uniform across Europe; Northern Europe experienced the highest growth rate.

creation of new ports, advancements in shipbuilding, and the invention of tools for navigation. Trade networks involved sea and land travel between Africa, East Asia, and Europe, facilitating knowledge exchange and the adoption of common technologies across these regions, such as irrigation methods for agriculture, the quadrant for navigation, and mechanical clocks.¹⁷⁴

During the 13th C, merchants and artisans organized in guilds that regulated their craft, set their privileges and obligations, and contributed to an unprecedented intellectual and creative development that required written records of commercial transactions, contracts, and technical trade books. Teacher/apprentice workshops imparted education on crafts that ensured their continuity through cohorts of apprentices, consistency across different workshops, and the improvement of the trade.

The Boom of Books

The social reorganization and globalization enticed a broader readership and opened new markets for manuscript production; the Rothschild Pentateuch was part of this emerging trend. The success of the incipient economies required a literate bourgeoisie class,¹⁷⁵ capable of performing transactions across regions and engaging in innovative technological enterprises. The bourgeoisie's increasing wealth gained them access to aristocracy's affairs, such as financing wars or presiding city-charters, and with it a craving for learning the manners and customs of the aristocracy. Epic stories of noblemen and romances exposed the aristocracy's habits, and by the

¹⁷⁴ Bryan C. Keene. *Toward a Global Middle Ages: Encountering the World through Illuminated Manuscripts* (The J. Paul Getty Museum: Los Angeles, 2019), 5.

¹⁷⁵ Tyrel C. Eskelson, "States, Institutions, and Literacy Rates in Early-Modern Western Europe," in *Journal of Education and Learning* 10 no.2 (2021), 109.

12th C leisure literature was emerging.¹⁷⁶ Books with moralizing narratives, and devotional books about the life of saints¹⁷⁷ were also in demand. Patrons other than the clergy and nobility commissioned technical, legal, leisure, and devotional books, and by the end of the 13th century, books were used not only in monasteries and worship houses, but also privately in palaces, affluent households, administrative centers, and workshops.

The intellectual expansion of the first half of the 13th C incentivized the establishment of new universities in Italy (Padua, Naples, Siena), Spain (Salamanca) and France (Toulouse and Orléans) where members of the nobility and clergy could get degrees in Law, Medicine, and Theology. The founding of new universities coincided with access to antiquity's Greek texts, Aristotle observational natural philosophy, and Arab scholarly works translated into Latin. These translations resulted in an influx of books on medicine, astronomy, mathematics, law, agriculture, alchemy, and natural philosophy. Universities incorporated the "rediscovered" knowledge in their curricula and teaching methods initiating a long trajectory of innovations in the arts, medicine, science, engineering, warfare, and agriculture throughout the following centuries.

The demand of technical, scientific, legal, philosophical, leisure, and devotional literature due to the increase of the number of universities and workshops, and the rising of the bourgeoisie class required the production of books in a scale that was not attainable by the production methods used in monastic scriptoria. In monasteries, scribing was considered a spiritual and meditative experience oblivious to time frames set by a demanding market. Additionally,

¹⁷⁶ Elizabeth Morrison, *Book of Beasts, The Bestiary in the Medieval World* (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles 2009), 27

¹⁷⁷ Such as Book of Hours and Psalters.

monastic monks alternated their scribal work with other daily services allocating no more than six hours a day and accomplishing about 150-200 lines of text per day.¹⁷⁸ Although often times a team of scribes wrote the text of a manuscript simultaneously, each working on their own section, a Bible volume could take more than two years to complete.¹⁷⁹ By the second half of the 13th C manuscripts were produced not only in monastic scriptoria but also in secular workshops that employed specialized artisans in parchment making, scribing, illuminating, and manuscript binding. These artisans worked collaboratively streamlining the production of a manuscript. They worked in urban centers -near to churches and universities- and diversified the production of manuscripts, including works as the Rothschild Pentateuch.

During the 13th century and in response to the demands from universities, Paris and Oxford became major centers for book production. Books for university students required new systems for controlling the accuracy of the copied information.¹⁸⁰ *Librarii* were people who edited and sold accurate versions of university books, called *Exemplaria*. *Librarii* certified the authenticity of the text of a book and in some cases, they served as illuminators but did not identify themselves in the books they certified.¹⁸¹ Book accuracy was a critical concern for the production of religious and scientific books, as is attested by the many methods of validation through models book and *Exemplaria* used in monastic scriptoria and secular workshops, such validation systems were applied to manuscripts written in Latin and Hebrew.

¹⁷⁸ Raymond Clements and Timothy Graham. *Introduction To Manuscript Studies* (Cornell University Press, 2008), 23.

¹⁷⁹ The two volume Stavelot Bible (British Library, MSS 28106-7) was written by two scribes, and it took 4 years to complete, The Moralized Bible of Blanche of Castile took eight to ten years, etc...

¹⁸⁰ The accuracy of mathematical, astronomical, and alchemist tables was a serious concern as the construction of buildings, the calculation of agricultural cycles, and the making of remedies depended on them. The scribing system significantly contributed to the propagation of errors.

¹⁸¹ Jonathan Alexander, *Medieval illuminators and their methods of work* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1992), 23

The increase in the production of technical and leisure manuscripts responded to the social changes that resulted from the transition from a rural feudal system to an urban self-governed system, and access to the knowledge of classical antiquity, medicine, and agriculture. In turn, these manuscripts contributed to the improvement of trades, increasing the economic prosperity that consolidated the new social class of artisans and merchants.

Methods of Manuscript Production in the 13th C

The Rothschild Pentateuch presents signs of the process of manuscript making (such as ruled folios, parchment marks, and pricks marks) are still visible, as the scribes and illuminator followed the rules and methods of their trade. The making of a book was considered a “mechanical art.” Unlike the liberal arts -rhetoric, logic, grammar, arithmetic, geometry, music, and cosmology- that were taught at universities, mechanical arts involved apprenticeships in workshops where technical knowledge was transmitted and regulated. Technical codices about manuscript production dictated the rules and methods of the industry which involved the concerted effort of different kinds of artisans, including parchment makers, scribes, and illuminators. There were two types of books for bookmaking: technical art treatises¹⁸² -organized in a didactic manner to train artists in different trades- and recipe treatises for the preparation of parchment, colors, and inks, and the application of colors on the parchment.¹⁸³ Technical books for manuscript production addressed parchment preparation, mixing painting colors and inks, and gilding.

¹⁸² For example, *Schedula* attributed to Theophilus Prebyster (1070-1125) and Cenninno Cennini (1360-1427) *I'll Libro del Arte*

¹⁸³ Stella Panayotova, *The Art and Science of Illuminated Manuscripts: A Handbook* (Harvey Miller Pub: London, 2020), 26.

Parchment Makers and Their Trade

Parchment was the writing support material for most medieval European manuscripts until paper production increased in the 14th C, when parchment was reserved for valuable manuscripts.¹⁸⁴ Parchment was a receptive material for writing with ink and making colored illustrations. Its quality depended on the skin type -usually calf, sheep, or goat- and the method of preparation of the animal skin. Calf and sheep skins were commonly used in northern Europe, while goat skin was used in Italy, the eastern Mediterranean region, and northern Africa. Vellum -usually made off the membrane of young kids or lambs- was used for very luxurious manuscripts.¹⁸⁵ Parchment was provided by professional parchment makers.¹⁸⁶

Parchment preparation required several steps: 1) cleaning and dehairing the animal skin, 2) stretching the skin on a wooden frame for drying and thinning, 3) removing any remaining hair (outer side) and flesh or fat tissue (inner side) with a curved blade, 4) polishing and powdering the skin with chalk, 5) cutting the skin into regular sheets of parchment, and 6) folding the sheets to form a *bifolium* (two parchment leaves). On average, a calf provided three and a half parchment sheets (about seven folios) of medium size.¹⁸⁷

To use the most of an animal skin, irregular parchment sheets showing the contour of the original skin (e.g., a curved shoulder line) were acceptable in the production of manuscripts. Eventually irregular sheets were fixed by sewing an additional piece of parchment. Seldom

¹⁸⁴ Raymond Clements and Timothy Graham, *Introduction To Manuscript Studies*, p. 9

¹⁸⁵ An Example is the Codex Argenteus, a 6th C illuminated manuscript containing a translation of the Christian Bible into Gothic language housed at the Carolina Rediviva Library of the University of Uppsala, Sweden. The manuscript is on vellum stained purple and is included in the UNESCO's Memory of the World Register.

¹⁸⁶ By the end of the 13th C there were nineteen parchment shops in Paris. See Alexander, p. 36.

¹⁸⁷ Alexander, p. 11.

defective folios were discarded, and some folios present holes and gashes, either produced at the time when the animal was alive or resulting from the stretching process.¹⁸⁸ Occasionally, holes and gashes were repaired while the skin was in the stretching frame.¹⁸⁹ Parchment sheets (bifolium and single folios) were sewn together to form a *quire* (or booklet) usually of 4, 6, 8, or 12 folia. Because there was no numbering of pages, many medieval illuminated manuscripts used a system of quire marks or catchwords for the proper assemblage of the quires. Many these features (such as holes, and gashes) of the parchment can be seen in the folios of the Rothschild Pentateuch, to be discussed in the next chapter.

Scribes and Their Trade

Manuscript production usually involved scribes with different levels of expertise. Novice scribes ruled the folio using a ruler and pricking tool. The pricking tool was applied on the vertical edges of a folio, and horizontal lines were traced between the pricks. Vertical lines defined the width of a text column, and pricks in the lower and upper edges of a folio confined the text area. The ruling of the Rothschild Pentateuch's folios is still noticeable.

Novice scribes also set placeholders for the illuminations, including miniatures,¹⁹⁰ carpet pages, historiated initials, word panels, and decorations. Experienced scribes wrote the text, were involved in the choice of images, planned the placement of the figures, and directed the work of the illuminator(s). Sometimes, contractual expectations were further developed in programmatic

¹⁸⁸ Holes and gashes can be seen in a wide range of extant medieval manuscripts, including manuscripts for royalty, clergy, and other patrons.

¹⁸⁹ Repairs made on the parchment maker frame are evident by the oval shape of the needle holes around the gash.

¹⁹⁰ Miniature refers to colored illustration that incorporated *minium*, a compound derived from aluminum present in the pigments of medieval manuscripts.

instructions that were written on the manuscript itself, as in the case of the Belleville Breviary (1325) where instructions were at the beginning of the manuscript¹⁹¹ as rubrics¹⁹² or by the margins.

Scribes worked on ruled folios using writing tools that depended on the region where they were active and the kind of script they used. A reed pen was usually used in the Mediterranean region while a quill pen (preferable of geese) was used in western and northern Europe. Images of 13th C scribes often depict them with a pen in one hand and a penknife in the other, as in Figure 36. Penknives were used to erase mistakes by scrapping the ink. Black ink suitable for parchment writing was obtained from the tannic acid of oak-galls (tumor-like formations on oak's twigs due to wasps laying their eggs) mixed with iron sulfates. The 13th C scribe would write the main text, starting the first sentence below the top horizontal line, and leave space for the folio's decorations. Sometimes the scribe would cue the illuminator on initials, often traced by the margin of the folio.

Intricate illuminated manuscripts with miniatures, word panels, and carpet pages required careful advance planning by the scribe and patron. From the 13th C onwards, when manuscripts were produced in secular workshops and monastic scriptoria, the writing and decoration of a codex might have been made in different places.¹⁹³ In order to ensure consistency across workshops and throughout time, religious manuscripts required the scribes to use model books from which the text was copied.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Alexander p. 53.

¹⁹² As in a 13th C Psalter, with instructions for historiated initials. Cambridge Univ. Library. MS, Ee4.24 folio 32v.

¹⁹³ Alexander, p. 22.

¹⁹⁴ The first standardized Latin version of the Old and New Testament was produced by St. Jerome in the late 4th C. The first standard Hebrew Bible is the Damascus Codex (10th C), considered the most authoritative manuscript for Masoretic text.



Figure 36. Edwine the Scribe. Edwine Psalter (1160-1170), folio 283v. In one hand a stylus and in the other a penknife. Trinity College, Cambridge, (MS R.17.1)

Illuminators and Their Trade

Illuminators drew, painted, gilded, and prepared the paints using a variety of pigments and fixing substances. Illuminators often followed traditional conventions in the choice of images to represent biblical themes¹⁹⁵ and copied the images from model books. Because most illuminators only read the first few words of a text, it is possible that there were protocols for identifying images to be associated with the first few words of a text. Up to the 12th C, miniatures were made on patches of parchment and pasted on a written folio.¹⁹⁶ In this way, illuminators used spare pieces of parchment and unsatisfactory miniatures were discarded without compromising the whole folio. An early method for copying images was *pouncing*,

¹⁹⁵ For example, there are traditional conventions to illuminate the six days of creation regularly shown in initials at the beginning of each verse of the Book of Genesis in 13th C French and English Bibles.

¹⁹⁶ Alexander p. 35

where illuminators pricked the image's template over the parchment.¹⁹⁷ Once the contour of the image was completed, the illuminator rubbed a cloth bag with powdered pigment on the template such that the pigment would penetrate the pricks, leaving an outline on the parchment. By the 13th C onwards, illuminators also copied images using tracing "paper" made of a very thin kid parchment coated with line seed oil.¹⁹⁸ Illuminators' tools for drawing included a hard-point metal or bone stylus, and graphite media.¹⁹⁹ In some instances, illuminators used a compass to trace circles. Graphite drawings and traces of compass usage are still visible in few folios of the Rothschild Pentateuch.

The high volume of manuscript production incentivized the use of standard images and motifs to increase its efficiency while providing a visual cue for text that was repeated throughout the manuscript.²⁰⁰ Standard motifs were compiled in model books that solidified typical imagery used in many workshops²⁰¹. Model books guided the work illuminators, facilitated the homogeneity within and across manuscripts, and served as catalogs for patrons. Model books were transported across regions ensuing a unified visual interpretation of the text.

Illuminators copied images out of model books, and it was customary for artists to collect drawings in personal sketchbooks for further reference.²⁰² Most model books included ink drawings of human characters' gestures, poses, and facial expressions, group figures, architecture, details of drapery, decorated initials, bestiaries, and florals. Besides model books,

¹⁹⁷ Clements, p. 30.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Graphite appeared by the 12th C. Graphite doodles on the edges of a folio are not uncommon in medieval manuscripts. See Alexander p. 38-39.

²⁰⁰ For example, the motif for purity was a maiden holding a dove; a scribe/illuminator was represented working on a lectern with a knife and a pencil.

²⁰¹ Alexander p. 52

²⁰² Panyaotova, p. 29.

illuminators used other sources for images, such as bestiaries, books of plants, medicine books that depicted the human body, etc. For example, the Rothschild Pentateuch illuminations incorporate images of fantastic and real animals from 13th C bestiaries.

The pigments used in the illumination of manuscripts were of two types: organic-based pigments derived from plants, lichens, insects, and mollusks; and inorganic-based pigments obtained from minerals and metals.²⁰³ Some pigments resulted from chemical transformations of raw material, while others were applied as a juice dye or dissolved powder in some solvent. In addition to home-made paints, commercial paints were available in cosmopolitan cities -such as Pisa, Genoa, Venice, Lisbon, Burges, Paris, Nuremberg, etc.- and the major fairs in Germany - Cologne, Frankfurt, and Leipzig- and in France, Champagne.

The color palette used in a manuscript was related to its illumination program. Highly decorated manuscripts required a considerable range of colors other than red, green, and blue, typical of initials and titles of austere manuscripts. The vast illumination program of the Rothschild Pentateuch incorporated a wide range of colors and can be considered a luxury manuscript. Indeed, colors of luxury manuscripts usually included bright orange (from lead oxide or massicot) and vermilion (from mineral cinnabar or mercury sulphite, an expensive paint), ultramarine blue (from lapis lazuli mined in East Asia, it was the most expensive pigment), azurite (from hydrated copper carbonate), and indigo (extracted from a plant *Indigofera tinctorial*), green (from copper), pink (from insect-based dyes), yellow (obtained from earths, plants, and arsenic-based pigments), and brown (from red earths).²⁰⁴ The knowledge for producing paints was secretive, and it was transmitted orally from master to apprentice, yet

²⁰³ Panayotova , p. 127.

²⁰⁴ Panayotova, p. 151.

there were technical treatises used across workshops that provided the basic principles, such as *Mappae Clavicula* (written and edited between 9th and 12th centuries). Sometimes colors were chosen to emphasize the meaning of a text; for example, the use of gold signified light, and the use of blue was associated with the Virgin Mary and the French crown.²⁰⁵

Illuminated manuscripts used gold or silver. Because silver tends to corrode the parchment, most extant illuminated manuscripts include gold. Gold was applied in two ways: as thin metal leaves or in a liquid form. The application of metal leaves could be flat -directly applied on the parchment- or raised by preparing a substrate of gypsum, chalk, and lead white over which the gold leaf was applied. The raised style allowed the artist to create textures on the shining surface by punching dots and lines. From the mid-thirteen century on it was in fashion a golden surface with a blue-grey-black hue obtained by coloring the substrate.²⁰⁶ Liquid gold was obtained by mixing gold, mercury or other salt, honey, egg white, gum, and fish glue resulting into a viscous liquid that was poured over a shell (hence the phrase “shell gold”).²⁰⁷ This liquid was brushed or penned over the parchment.²⁰⁸ In some cases illuminators used a mix of gold and silver to reduce the cost of the manuscript and avoided the pale-yellow hue of the mix by coloring the substrate with yellow pigments. During the 12th century the labor-intensive liquid gold was substituted by leaves facilitated by manuscript production in indoor non-draughty workshops, where thin gold leaves could be easily manipulated. The use of gold leaves also coincided with the development of a luxury textile industry that used thin strips of gold for

²⁰⁵ Clements p. 31.

²⁰⁶ Panayotova, p. 131

²⁰⁷ Clements, p. 33.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

making gold threads.²⁰⁹ The Rothschild Pentateuch features an extended color palette and is mainly illuminated in gold in the raised style.

The Rothschild Pentateuch was produced following a period of a significant shift in the style of artistic expressions, between the 12th and 13th centuries, from Romanesque to Gothic. Changes occurred in drawing, painting, and architecture, and some Romanesque and Gothic elements are present in the illuminations of the manuscript. Romanesque illuminations were characterized by ink-outlined images depicting simplified figures with round body limbs and drapery.²¹⁰

Romanesque architecture was characterized by large buildings of thick brick walls, small windows, semicircular arches, and heavy piers. The Gothic style is characterized by elaborate backgrounds with expressive figures, fluid drapery, gestural movement, naturalistic human forms, and architectural elements. Visual compositions include architectural framings and decorated backgrounds. In the Gothic style, geometry plays a critical role in figurative representations and carries a symbolic meaning. For example, a triangle embodied the Trinity, and a circle the eternity of God²¹¹. The influence of geometry is eloquent in the sketchbook of Villard de Honnecourt (1220-1235) a French mason who attempted to demonstrate that geometric shapes are the basis of all figures as it is shown in Figure 37. The Gothic style colors are intense, with a predominance of blue hues emulating contemporary stained-glass windows²¹². Manuscripts' figures were colored with gouache, tempera, watercolor, or ink, and gilded in gold and silver.

²⁰⁹ Panayotova, p. 132

²¹⁰ Body parts and drapery were considered the same.

²¹¹ Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art through the Ages: A Global History*, Vol I p. 16th ed. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2020), 403.

²¹² In France, several illuminators were also stained-glass artists. See Kleiner, p. 403.

This approach was in contrast with the practice of northern Spain monastic scriptoria, where illuminators were acknowledged in the manuscript 's colophon or through a small self-portrait at the end of the codex.²¹⁶ As is the case for other contemporary manuscripts, the Rothschild Pentateuch's illuminator is unknown.

The increasing demand of books urged monasteries contracting with lay illuminators and by the 13th C paid illuminators were well established, as is attested by extant contracts and city tax documents.²¹⁷ In some cases, talented artisans served as scribes and illuminators, and depending on the resources of the patron, more than one illuminator was employed in making the manuscript. Illuminators employed by patrons established a private practice free of guilds' regulations, and their contracts specified the expectations of the patrons as to the number of illuminations, their size, their type (initials, miniatures, etc...), location in the text, and pigments.²¹⁸ In the late 14th century, illuminators joined the guild of scribes and painters with established statutes.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Illuminator's self-portrait can be seen in the *Commentary on the Apocalypse of Beatus* from Liebana (775), the *Girona Apocalypse* (975), and the "*Madrid*" (*Morgan Beatus*) *Apocalypse* (970).

²¹⁷ Secular paid illuminators owned property, and their possessions were described in taxes and other documents. See Alexander p. 20.

²¹⁸ Alexander p. 53

²¹⁹ For example, French guilds regulated the quality of the materials of the trade, prohibiting the import of objects made outside France. See Alexander p. 30

APPENDIX II: THE MATERIALITY OF THE ROTHSCHILD PENTATEUCH

The material aspects of a manuscript along with considerations of its historical, social, and cultural contexts can enhance the understating of its creation and usage by providing grounds to speculate on issues of ownership and reading habits.²²⁰ With this in mind, the Rothschild Pentateuch is examined according to the following parameters, quire's (booklet) collation, kind of texts and scripts, page layout, parchment physical condition, and glosses and graffiti. The first three parameters were conceived at the production stage of the manuscript, the last two relate to the book's usage.

Quire's Collation or Organization of Pages

The sophisticated method by which the manuscript was assembled is an indication of the highly skilled craftsmen who were involved in the Rothschild Pentateuch. The folios (folio refers to a side of a page, there are verso and reverso folios to a page) of the Rothschild Pentateuch were collated in a set of 75 quires (booklets) of contiguous text (no missing folio).²²¹ The manuscript has no page numbers but a system of catch words,²²² frequently included in micrographic figures on the last verso folio of a quire, as in folio 489v in Figure 38, to facilitate the correct compilation of the quires. The assemblage pattern alternates between quires with eight, six, three, and four folios. Quires with eight folios were collated together in groups of multiple quires (14 quires, 3 quires, etc.). Six, four, and three folio single quires alternated with

²²⁰ Javier del Barco del Barco, J. "From the Archaeological Turn to 'Codicologie Structurale': The Concept of Codicology and the Material Description of Hebrew Manuscripts," Irina Wandrey (Ed.), *Jewish Manuscripts Cultures: New Perspectives*. (De Gruyter: Berlin, Boston, 2017), 3–28.

²²¹ The J. Paul Getty Museum Dept. of Manuscripts document, Accession Number: 2018.43.

²²² These are words that are repeated at the lower left corner of a folio and the upper right corner of the next folio. Matching the repeated word assured the correct compilation of the manuscript.

groups of 8-folio quires, such that for every group of 8-folio quires there was a quire with lesser folios. There are sixty-seven 8-folio quires, five 6-folio quires, two 3-folio quires, and one 4-folio quire. The alternated assemblage increased the functionality and preservation of the manuscript, as it reduced the tension in the book spine when opening it.

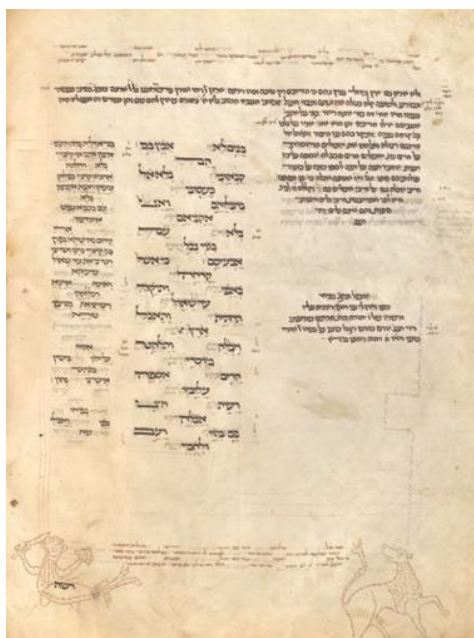


Figure 38. Catchword inside a mermaid micrography of the Masorah Raba; folio 489v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

The beginning of quire 30 corresponds to the end of the Book of Exodus and is followed by a page with text in micrography where the scribe Elijah ben Yehiel added his name in a rosette, see folio 224 in Figure 39. The last quire ends with the main scribe colophon, followed by an additional page that on its verso side (folio 584v) there is a God praising poem added after the completion of the manuscript, by the early 17th C.²²³ Another addition to the manuscript is a

²²³ The poem has the name (resulting from an anagram) of Yehiel Michal Ha Cohen, possibly a member of the Rapa Ha Cohen family from Venice, active in 1648. The poem praises God and has cantillation marks, indicating that it was meant to be recited.

word panel illuminated by the artist Joel ben Simon inserted in the book of Deuteronomy 29:9, in the folio 478, by the end of the 15th C replacing the original folio.²²⁴

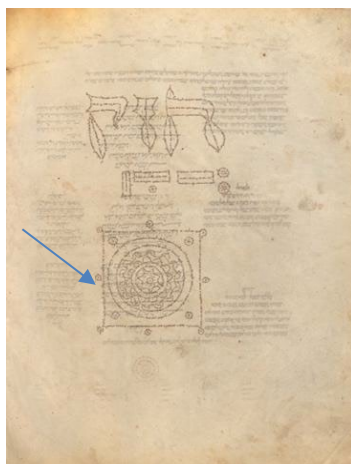


Figure 39. Name of the scribe of the *Masorah Raba* in micrography, folio 224v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

The passages from the books of *Prophets* and *Judges* (*haftaroth*) that supplemented the readings of the Pentateuch, were collated at the end of the manuscript.²²⁵ The order in which the haftaroth were compiled could indicate a specific Jewish liturgical tradition, as the supplemental biblical passages read by Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities differ a little.²²⁶ The order of the haftaroth in the Rothschild Pentateuch is mixed, such that out of the 54 readings, two are specific to the Sephardic tradition and two are according to the Ashkenazi tradition. Thus, the manuscript cannot be associated with a specific tradition nor a place of origin from its assemblage.

²²⁴ Even though the script is the same as in the rest of the Pentateuch, the calligraphy of the added folio differs from the calligraphy of other folios.

²²⁵ That was the standard order included in other medieval Hebrew manuscripts.

²²⁶ Most haftaroth are the same for both Sephardic and Ashkenazi, but only very few are exclusively read by one community or the other.

If a Parchment Could Speak! Parchment Physical Conditions

Stains and tears of a manuscript 's parchment are witnesses of its usage. They tell the story of where and under which circumstances patrons read, touched, browsed, transported, and stored, a book. This section addresses aspects of the folios as are seen today (about 800 years after the completion of the Rothschild Pentateuch) by looking at its parchment's physical condition.

The parchment of the Rothschild Pentateuch is thin, as is attested by the translucency of images and texts across the two sides of a page. Thin parchment was expensive to produce as it required a longer stretching time and more intensive scrapping. The scribes were careful to reserve the flesh side of the parchment for the verso folios of the manuscript, while on the verso folios hair follicles of the animal skin are still visible.²²⁷ The flesh side of the parchment is smoother and lighter than the hair side and contains the majority (65%) of the illuminations of the Rothschild Pentateuch.

The passage of time and exposure to different environments leave marks on the parchment, such as wrinkles, mold, stains, holes, and gashes. Wrinkled folios, particularly noticeable in sections without illuminations, resulted from exposures to hot and cold temperatures that produced uneven expansions and contractions of the parchment. Similarly, exposure to humidity produced mold stains in the form of clusters of small round dark spots

²²⁷ Noticeable hair side is an indication of a French manufacture of the parchment, unlike parchment from Germany where the hair side was smoothed so it wasn't noticeable. See Sarit Shalev Eyni. "In the Days of the Barley Harvest: The Iconography of Ruth," in *Artibus et Historiae*, 26, no. 51 (2005), 37-57.

often seen on the folios' flesh side (verso). Wrinkles and mold stains are an indication of poor storage or lack of proper cover.²²⁸

Besides the marks that resulted from environmental conditions, the manuscript shows stains originated from its use, such as stains from wax, liquids, paints, and finger reaction. Some folios of the Rothschild Pentateuch present irregular discolored brown-red blotches from the edge down the rest of the folio. These blotches appear in groups of consecutive folios (such as in folios 189r to 199v) but the color intensity and spread of the blotch diffuses across the folios. The discolored blotches are not uniform and present darkened areas surrounded by lighter ones. Other stained brown areas have a uniform discoloration and localized to individual folios, denoting a different damage source. From a visual examination it is not possible to assert whether these are liquid (such as water or wine) or wax stains. Finger reaction stains can be seen throughout the folios of the manuscripts on the lower edges of the folios.

Parchment tears -holes and gashes- can result from stretching and scrapping the parchment during its preparation phase, pest damage from rodents, moths, etc., or from the mere use of the manuscript. Holes produced at the preparation phase have an oblong shape along the stretching axis; irregular tears are usually associated with pest damage or usage. Most holes present in the manuscript have an oval shape with a main diameter between 0.5"- 1", and are untreated²²⁹ such as in folio 395v, in Figure 40. In some instances, scribes wrote the text around the tears, being this another indication that tears formed at the parchment 's preparation phase before scribing. Unlike holes, many gashes of the manuscript were repaired at the stretching

²²⁸ The current cover, in Maroon Marrocco, is from the 19th C. There are no remains of the original cover.

²²⁹ An exception is a small irregular hole on the right side of the carpet page, in folio 226v, that was mended with another piece of parchment stitched to the folio.

frame as it is attested by the oblong holes of the sewing needle along tears.²³⁰ It is possible that parchment makers found it easier to sew thin elongated tears than fix holes' small round surfaces. Because parchment was very expensive, keeping defective parchments was common practice²³¹ but the ability to repair them might have depended on the mastery of the parchment makers. By the 13th C onwards, major centers for manuscript production had shops of professional parchment makers.²³² Thus, it is possible that the Rothschild Pentateuch was produced in a region with limited access to parchment specialists.

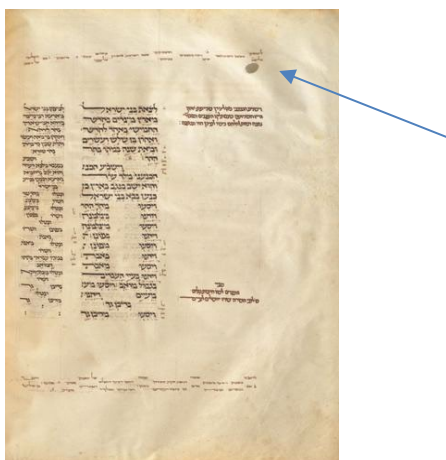


Figure 40. Hole on parchment on the upper right corner; folio 395v. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

Glosses and Graffiti

Unlike the parchment marks discussed above that were unintentional, glosses and graffiti resulted from the intentional interaction between the reader and the manuscript. The

²³⁰ The sewing thread is gone, but the sewing holes along the gash are stretched (hence their oblong shape) in opposite directions.

²³¹ Alexander, p. 36.

²³² Based on tax return records from 1292, Paris had 19 parchment workshops. See Alexander. p. 36.

term “glosses” refers to text annotations inserted in a folio in between the lines or at its margins after the completion of the manuscript for clarification or accuracy of the text. The Rothschild Pentateuch displays a large array of hand glossed text with varied calligraphy denoting the writing of different readers. Most glosses pertain to Rashi’s philosophical commentary reflecting the incipient incorporation of this commentary in manuscripts written for a lay audience.²³³

Although main scribes and illuminators of Latin manuscripts draw instructive images on the edges of the folios to guide the work of novice illuminators, such practice was uncommon in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts. So, it is surprising that in the lower left corner and bottom margin of the illuminated folio 574r in Figure 41 there are charcoal sketches of seven young male heads rendered in great detail, and four sketches of a standing human body leaning backwards, from the trace of the posture (on the right) to a figure holding a child at the center of the low margin. These sketches seem to be a study of the human figure, challenging the prohibition of including such images in the Scriptures.

Without chemical or optical analyses of the charcoal it is not possible to assert whether the graffiti were added during the time of execution of the manuscript or later. If the graffiti were added during manuscript’s completion, it could indicate that the illuminator was unaware of the prohibition of depicting the human body, and that the illumination program was independent of the supervision of the main scribe. If, on the contrary, the charcoal is dated after 1296, the presence of the sketches could indicate that, at some point, the manuscript was considered a

²³³ Rashi’s philosophical comments on the Pentateuch were written in the 11th C, and his disciples and family members compiled his writings in manuscript form during his lifetime or immediately after. The first extant manuscript containing Rashi’s philosophical comments on the Pentateuch is the *Munich Manuscript of Rashi* (BSB Cod. hebr. 5) written in 1232-1233.

source of parchment,²³⁴ or that the Rothschild Pentateuch served as a model book. Indeed, one of the head sketches is very similar to a figure included in the illumination of a previous folio, 509r, so it is possible that these sketches were training exercises of a later illuminator.

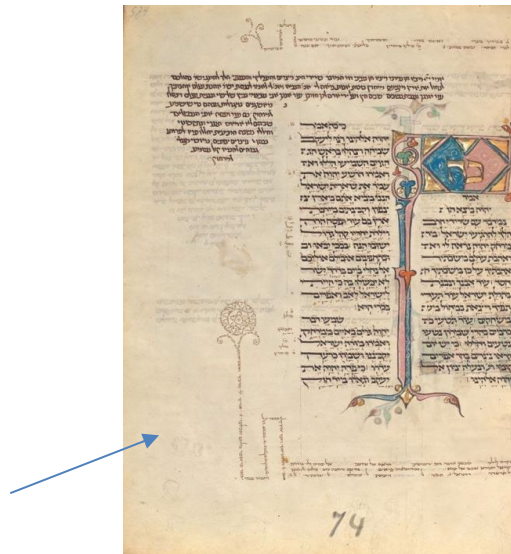


Figure 41. Graffiti on the lower margin of the folio, folio 574r. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Ms .116)

The analysis of the materiality of the Rothschild Pentateuch reveals the way in which it was created and used. The manuscript was made for the personal use of its patron, Joseph Martil ben Joseph, possibly a lay man who followed Jewish traditions. The manuscript was executed using 13th century artistry to embellish the sacred text²³⁵ and enhance the weekly experience of reading the Hebrew Bible, as is attested by its fine parchment, quire binding, scribing, illumination program, and pigments. The manuscript was in constant dialog with its readers,

²³⁴ The inner surfaces of the medieval codices were covered by a pastedown parchment, either with fresh parchment or with a bifolium of a discarded manuscript. This is the case of the pastedown of a 15th C Latin Bible, where the inner board covers are folios of Rashi's commentaries (Newberry Library, MS 158).

²³⁵ In Jewish tradition the embellishment of the sacred text is a pious act.

either through the glosses left on its folios or reflected by the marks of usage, in stains and finger reaction. Perhaps, is the role of current generations, as the latest depositories of the manuscript, to continue such dialog.