

Collectors' corner: medieval illuminated manuscript of the Psalms is the latest volume of Hebraica in facsimile

A medieval Hebrew masterpiece in the Palatina Library in Parma, Italy, has been chosen by Facsimile Editions, the London-based publishers of Hebraica reproductions, as its next collectible.

The profusely illuminated book of Psalms was written and decorated c. 1280, probably in Emilia in northern Italy. Its 452 pages contain the biblical text in large vocalised Hebrew, with many of the chapters illustrated with depictions of musical instruments — a rarity in medieval manuscripts — or with scenes described in the text.

Included in the volume is the commentary of Abraham ibn Ezra, also unusual in Hebrew manuscripts of

the period. And the text is further embellished with liturgies for engagements, marriages, circumcisions and funerals, as well as for the end of Shabbat followed by a festival, all occasions on which psalms are recited.

The manuscript is regarded as one of the great treasures of early Hebrew illumination. The Palatina Library, which holds some 1,650 similar manuscripts, is one of the world's great collections. It houses the library

of the Christian Hebraist, Giovanni Bernado de Rossi, who built up one of the richest collections of Hebrew manuscripts and printed books in private hands.

Complementing the facsimile version is a companion volume examining the manuscript and its history. Among the contributors are Malachi Beit-Arié, until recently director of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem; Nice Ugolotti, curator of Hebrew manuscripts at the Palatina Library; and Emmanuel Silver, formerly of the British Library in London.

Reproducing all aspects of the original — including colouring, cutting, gilding, tooling, binding and silver-smithing — in minutest detail, the facsimile has a pre-publication price of £1,650 until June 16 (thereafter, £1,850).

Further details are obtainable from the publishers at 40 Hamilton Terrace, London NW8 9UJ.



Psalm 61 — "For the Leader, with string music" — in the Palatina Library manuscript



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