

עם הספר (Am HaSefer)

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

أهل الكتاب ('Ahl al-Kitāb')

ART of THREE FAITHS

TORAH · BIBLE · QUR'AN

The Getty Museum recently acquired the Rothschild Pentateuch, a manuscript of the first five books of the Bible in Hebrew, known as the Torah. One of the most elaborately illuminated copies of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible created in the Middle Ages, the Rothschild Pentateuch is the first Hebrew manuscript to be added to the collection of the Getty Museum. Its acquisition allows the Getty for the first time to represent the medieval art of illumination in sacred texts of the three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, founded in that order. These religions trace their belief in the singular God to a common patriarch, the figure of Abraham (Ibrahim). Practitioners of all three religions have been called **people of the book** for their shared belief in the primacy of the divine word as conveyed through sacred scripture. Copies of the Torah, Christian Bible, and Qur'an are among the most beautifully illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages, represented here by three remarkable examples.

Acquired with the generous support of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder



Torah

The Torah is the central sacred text of Judaism. In the strictest sense, the word refers to the Pentateuch (“five books” in Greek), which contains the books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Illuminated copies of the Hebrew Bible in codex form (rather than Torah scrolls) began to appear in the mid-thirteenth century. In northern Europe, these manuscripts served the needs of members of the Ashkenazi Jewish community who had settled in the areas along the Rhine River (now western Germany and northern France). Lavishly illustrated Hebrew manuscripts are exceedingly rare, since Jewish artisans were forbidden by law to join painting guilds. Hebrew manuscripts were often written by itinerant Jewish scribes and illuminated by local (sometimes Christian) artists. Illumination of the Hebrew Bible centers on the calligraphic forms of Hebrew letters, such as initials, word panels, or decorative frames around blocks of text.



Rotation 1

■ ■ Menorah of the Tabernacle Decorated Text Page Book of Leviticus

France and/or Germany, 1296

ARTIST **Unknown**

Rothschild Pentateuch (text in Hebrew)

The J. Paul Getty Museum. Acquired with the generous support of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder

Ms. 116 (2018.43), fols. 226v–227

The vitality of the illuminations and the powerful beauty of the letterforms place the Rothschild Pentateuch among the masterpieces of medieval Hebrew book illumination. Portions of the Torah, based on prescribed weekly readings, are heralded by ornate panels in which letters stand out against colorful backgrounds. Fantastical beasts, animal-human hybrids, and plant

forms enliven the pages. A commanding, shimmering menorah introduces the book of Leviticus, which documents the proper care of the implements used in the Tabernacle (the earthly dwelling place of God), including the pure gold menorah. The towers that surmount the illumination evoke the setting of the Tabernacle, where the menorah served as the only source of light.

RECENT
ACQUISITION

 1642

Rotation 2

■ ■ Decorated Text Pages Book of Numbers

France and/or Germany, 1296

ARTIST **Unknown**

Rothschild Pentateuch (text in Hebrew)

The J. Paul Getty Museum. Acquired with the generous support of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder

Ms. 116 (2018.43), fols. 297v–298

The vitality of the illuminations and the powerful beauty of the letterforms place the Rothschild Pentateuch among the masterpieces of medieval Hebrew book illumination. Portions of the Torah, based on prescribed weekly readings, are heralded in the manuscript by ornate panels in which letters stand out against tapestry-like backgrounds while fantastical beasts, animal-human hybrids, and plant forms

weave intricate patterns around the page. A dynamic interplay of word and image introduces the book of Numbers. Fields of color surround rectilinear letterforms or create physical platforms for the figures in the margins. Such images enlivened the biblical text and commentary while honoring the preeminence of the word that defined the practice of Hebrew Bible study.

RECENT
ACQUISITION

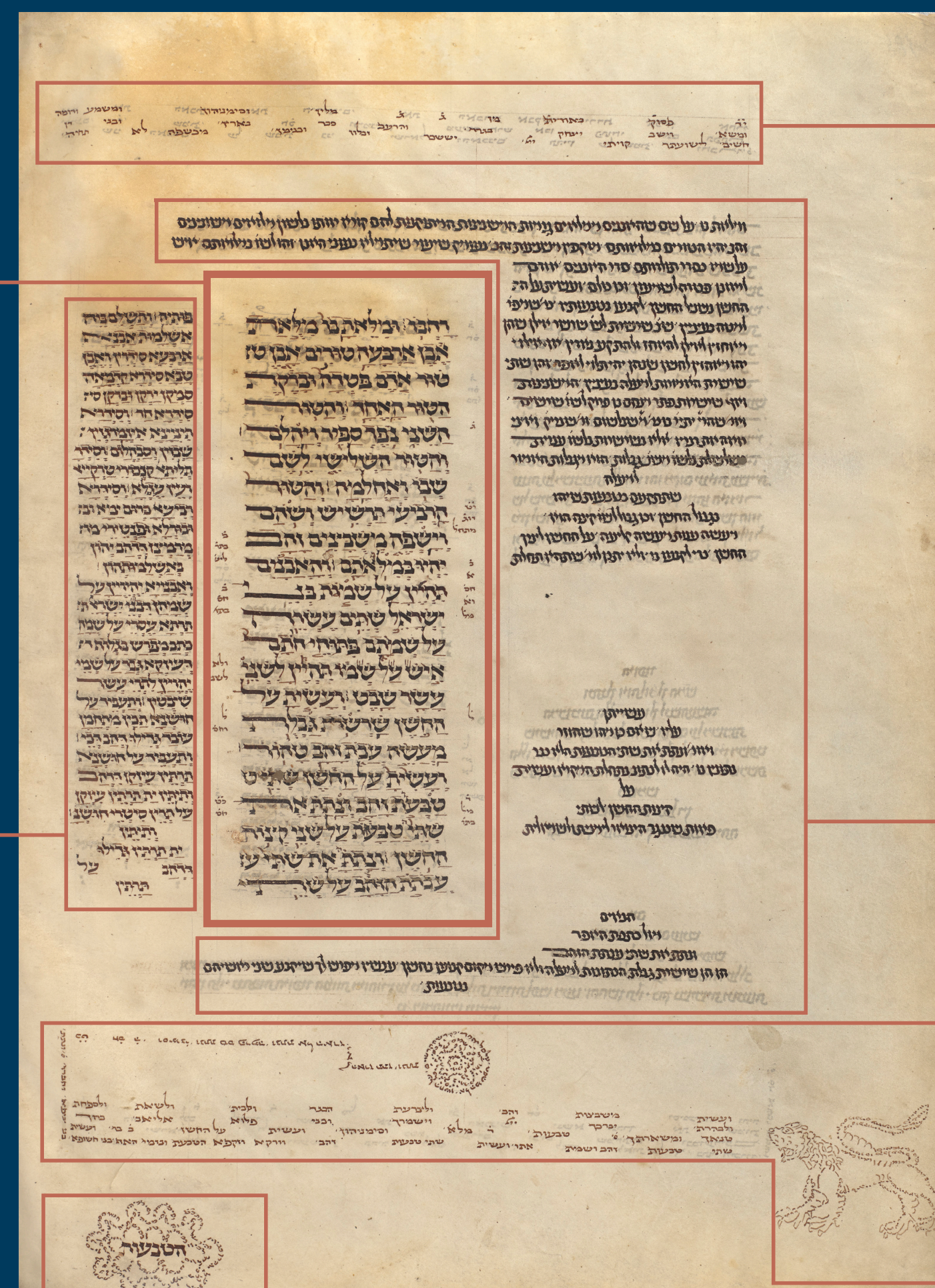
 1640



The Rothschild Pentateuch

Each page of the manuscript is divided into portions reserved for different aspects of its reading and comprehension. All of the texts are read from right to left.

At the center is the text of the Torah itself, written in a formal, square Hebrew script. It is accompanied by two sets of markings, one indicating the vowels (*nikkud*) and the other specifying the way the text is to be chanted in ritual contexts (*te'amin*, cantillation symbols).



The upper and lower margins contain the *masorah magna*, a commentary devoted to textual details such as the number of occurrences of individual words, which was intended to preserve the accuracy of the text of the Torah over time. This commentary was written in micrography, minute Hebrew letters that often formed elaborate shapes.

In the outer margin is commentary by Rashi, an acronym for Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki (1040–1105). His commentary on the Torah as recorded in the Rothschild Pentateuch is one of the earliest dated copies of this text to survive.

At the bottom left is a catchword, a guide to assembling the parts of a manuscript (or book) in the correct order. Catchwords, which appear at the end of a group of pages, give the first word of the next group.

The inner margin is occupied by Targum Onkelos, the Aramaic translation of the Torah, with additional interpretation. In a tradition dating to the second century, when Aramaic was commonly spoken, the Torah was read aloud in both Hebrew and Aramaic.

Throughout its more than one thousand pages, the Rothschild Pentateuch features a variety of illuminated motifs that range from the imposing to the whimsical (as shown at right). Ornamental Hebrew initials and words, gilded or in brilliant colors, dominate the pages, enhanced by a vast array of vibrant figures in the margins. The manuscript contains extensive examples of micrography, a unique medieval art form developed by Jewish scribes, in which marginal notations, written in tiny letters that formed elaborate geometric designs or shapes of plants and animals, meander along the bottoms and up the sides of the pages.

The manuscript takes its name from the Rothschild family, famed collectors who owned it in the early twentieth century. The family donated it to the university library in Frankfurt, Germany, sometime before 1920, where it remained throughout World War II. In 1950, the manuscript was part of an exchange between the German government and a Jewish family for land in Frankfurt that had been seized during the war. The Getty acquired the manuscript from this family in 2018, the result of a thirty-five-year search to extend the breadth of the collection and to share a distinguished example of medieval Hebrew manuscript illumination with visitors to the Museum, and online with the world.





Decorated Text Page Book of Genesis

France and/or Germany, 1296

ARTIST **Unknown**

Rothschild Pentateuch (text in Hebrew)

The J. Paul Getty Museum. Acquired with the generous support of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder

Ms. 116 (2018.43), fol. 32v





Decorated Text Page Book of Exodus

France and/or Germany, 1296

ARTIST

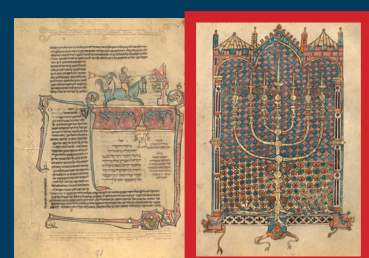
Unknown

Rothschild Pentateuch (text in Hebrew)

The J. Paul Getty Museum. Acquired with the generous support of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder

Ms. 116 (2018.43), fol. 130





Menorah of the Tabernacle Book of Leviticus

France and/or Germany, 1296

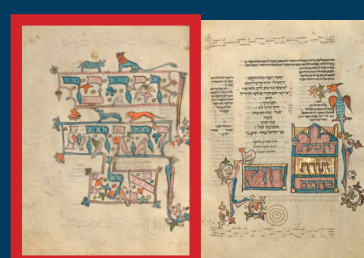
ARTIST **Unknown**

Rothschild Pentateuch (text in Hebrew)

The J. Paul Getty Museum. Acquired with the generous support of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder

Ms. 116 (2018.43), fol. 226v





Decorated Text Page Book of Numbers

France and/or Germany, 1296

ARTIST **Unknown**

Rothschild Pentateuch (text in Hebrew)

The J. Paul Getty Museum. Acquired with the generous support of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder

Ms. 116 (2018.43), fol. 298





Moses Addressing the Israelites Book of Deuteronomy

Italy, about 1450–1500

ARTIST

Joel ben Simeon

Rothschild Pentateuch (text in Hebrew)

The J. Paul Getty Museum. Acquired with the generous support of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder

Ms. 116 (2018.43), fol. 478

Sometime in the second half of the fifteenth century, one of the folios of the original manuscript was replaced by this insertion, which carefully replicated the original text and commentaries. By this time, however, the manuscript had traveled to Italy, and the illumination reflects a contemporary aesthetic. With the text panel as a sturdy ground, the figure of Moses addresses the Israelites as

recounted in Deuteronomy 29:9: “You stand this day, all of you, before the Lord, your God . . . all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to water-drawer.” This folio can be identified as the work of one of the most celebrated Jewish scribe-artists of the Renaissance, Joel ben Simeon.

Christian Bible

Among the earliest bound and illuminated codices from the Mediterranean world are copies of the Christian Bible written in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Ge'ez, Armenian, and other languages. The first part of the Christian Bible consists of texts from the Hebrew Bible, referred to since the second century by Christian writers as the Old Testament (*Vetus Testamentum*). Medieval Christians understood it not only as a historical document but also as a body of prophecy that specifically foretold the coming of Christ. The New Testament (*Novum Testamentum*) comprises accounts of Christ's life (the Gospels), letters to churches or individuals from his disciples, such as the Apostles Peter and Paul, and a text about the end of time known as Apocalypse or Revelation. Illuminated Bibles—handwritten and printed alike—are among the most enduring forms of Christian book art produced during the Middle Ages.



Rotation 1

Initial P: Saint Paul with a Sword

Cologne, about 1450

ARTIST **Circle of Stefan Lochner**

Bible (text in Latin)

The J. Paul Getty Museum

Ms. Ludwig I 13 (83.MA.62), fols. 375v–376

The shimmer of gold and brilliance of color enliven these carefully organized pages. Produced at a time when Johannes Gutenberg (about 1390–1468) began printing the first books in Europe with movable type, this handwritten Bible observes centuries-old hallmarks of manuscript production: carefully ruled lines (visible in the margins) arranged in two columns, embellished with decorated

letters and pen flourishes. On these pages, within the larger initial the artist depicted the Apostle Paul gesturing toward the words attributed to him. Alternating blue and red letters at the top indicate the book of the Bible—the Letter to the Romans and to the Corinthians—and phrases written in red indicate the beginning or ending of a book. This lavish copy of the Christian Bible was made for the cathedral of Cologne.



Rotation 2

Initial P: Saint Paul Initial P: Saint Paul

Cologne, about 1450

ARTIST **Circle of Stefan Lochner**

Bible (text in Latin)

The J. Paul Getty Museum

Ms. Ludwig I 13 (83.MA.62), fols. 390v–391

The shimmer of gold and brilliance of color enliven these carefully organized pages. Produced at a time when Johannes Gutenberg (about 1390–1468) began printing the first books in Europe with movable type, this handwritten Bible observes centuries-old hallmarks of manuscript production: carefully ruled lines (visible in the margins) arranged in two columns, embellished with decorated

letters and pen flourishes. On these pages, within the larger initials the artist depicted the Apostle Paul gesturing toward the words attributed to him. Alternating blue and red letters at the top indicate the book of the Bible—the Letter to Timothy and to Titus—and phrases written in red indicate the beginning or ending of a book. This lavish copy of the Christian Bible was made for the cathedral of Cologne.



Qur'an

The words that the angel Jibril (Gabriel) recited to the prophet Muhammad ibn Abdullah (about 560–632) formed the sacred text of the Qur'an. The opening line, “In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful” (بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ), a central tenet of Islam that expresses submission to the will of Allah (God), is repeated in almost every *surah* (chapter). Muslims transmitted scripture through oral tradition for the first few centuries, and later recorded it through beautiful and ornate calligraphy. Artists incorporated Quranic verses into books, textiles, coins, ceramics, and architecture, demonstrating reverence for the written word. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Islamic world spanned a vast territory, from the Iberian Peninsula to northern and coastal Africa, across the Mediterranean basin, and as far as Central and Eastern Asia.

Rotation 1 & 2

Decorated Text Page **(Sūrat al-An‘ām 6:121–122)**

Tunisia, 9th century CE / second century AH

ARTIST **Unknown**

Qur’an (text in Arabic)

The scribe of this Qur’an began by writing the Arabic letters in thin layers of glue, and then adroitly adhered sheets of gold leaf, reserved in Islamic art for the word of Allah (God). Next, the letterforms were outlined in brown ink, and finally vowel sounds were indicated by short slashes or colored dots in red, blue, and green. Ornamental rosettes (*shamsa*) contain the verse numbers, and

the intricately ornamented facing page of alternating gold and blue text includes word counts. The text would have been recited aloud in a mosque, perhaps at the Great Mosque in Kairouan, Tunisia, where the manuscript may have been produced in the ninth century, or the second century AH (*Anno Hegirae*), according to the Islamic lunar calendar.

The J. Paul Getty Museum

Ms. Ludwig X 1 (83.MM.118), fols. 9v–10

 1644

This material was published in 2018 to coincide with the J. Paul Getty Museum exhibition *Art of Three Faiths: A Torah, a Bible, and a Qur'an*, August 7, 2018–February 3, 2019, at the Getty Center.

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