

### Manuscript 74

Manuscript 74 is a Hebrew Bible, hand-written on vellum in Hebrew script. It was produced in Spain in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and was rebound on April 29, 1949 by Ronald MacDonald Specialists. It has 291 leaves, with text on both sides, and its dimensions are 12-1/2 x 9-5/8 inches.<sup>1</sup>

The manuscript is missing the Pentateuch, as well as 2 Kings 10:12b-Isaiah 19:19a, and only contains up to 3:13 of Esther.<sup>2</sup> The books in the *Nevi'im* (Prophets) portion of the manuscript adhere to the standard order. The ordering of the books in the *Ketuvim* (Writings) portion is as follows: Chronicles, Psalms, Proverbs, Ruth, Job, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther.

The manuscript text appears in two columns on each page, with the exception of Hebrew poetry, which is laid out according to the poetic verse. The *Masorah* (notes written by the Masoretes to help ensure accurate transmission of the biblical text) is written in minute script and is used to form intricate designs around the pages. The most elaborate designs can be found in the book of Psalms and on the first page of the book of Joshua.

The manuscript includes no original pagination; a later owner has numbered the pages on the front but not the back. Chapters and verses are also not numbered, with the exception of the book of Psalms; the number of each Psalm has been incorporated into the designs around the pages.

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<sup>1</sup> Brentano's manuscript info insert (found in back of manuscript).

<sup>2</sup> "Library Record," Columbia University Libraries, accessed March 13, 2015, <http://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/4586763?counter=3>.

Verse division is marked by the presence a *sof passuk*, a Hebrew accent mark resembling a colon, at the end of each verse. Chapter division is marked only by a half-line of indentation. Division of biblical books is usually indicated by a few lines of space, but in certain instances there are small designs formed with the minute *Masorah* script inserted in between biblical books. For instance, there is a diamond-shape *Masorah* design between Proverbs and Ruth and a circle-shape *Masorah* design between Job and Daniel. The final verse of “Prophets” (Malachi 3:24) ends about one third of the page down, leaving the rest of the page blank; the first verse of “Writings” (1 Chronicles 1:1) begins at the top of the next page.

A rather peculiar and interesting element of the manuscript is the way 2 Chronicles concludes. 2 Chronicles is written in the standard two-column Hebrew script up to 36:21. The final two verses (36:22-23) are then written on a separate page in the shape of a triangle that comes to a point at the bottom; the page is otherwise empty. The following page continues with the first verse of Psalms.

A later owner of the manuscript has written Hebrew words in various places in the margins, which look to be textual corrections. Clearly also the work of a later owner, one of the page margins contains a drawing in black ink of what may be a *mezuzah* (a small case containing a scroll which Jews are commanded to affix to their doorposts) with Hebrew script written inside.

The front page of the manuscript contains an inscription in Hebrew identifying the original owner. It reads:

“This book belongs to the dear and excellent Rabbi Abraham son of  
Rabbi Samuel Nehardea, of pious memory”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Brentano’s manuscript info insert (found in back of manuscript).

The subsequent owners, indicated in the marginal notes, were Baruch Niego, son of Abraham Alasarki and Baruch Niego, son of Isaac Niego.<sup>4</sup> The most recent owner of the manuscript, prior to Union Theological Seminary, was Dr. Louis Loewe, an Oriental Linguist and Hebrew lecturer to the Duke of Sussex. Loewe acquired the manuscript in Constantinople on his return from Damascus with Sir Moses Montefiore, famed leader of British Jewry. The manuscript was purchased by Union Theological Seminary from Brentano's in 1947.<sup>5</sup>

Manuscript 74 emerged out of the Jewish community in Catholic Spain at a time of rising anti-Semitism from both the general populace and the crown. During the massacres of Jews in 1366 and 1391, many Jewish texts and Torah scrolls were also destroyed. Though it is unverifiable, the missing pieces of this manuscript may be attributed to violence against the Jewish communities in the region and time period of its creation.

Many Jews fled Spain during the 14<sup>th</sup> century to escape persecution. In 1492, all the Jews were officially expelled from Spain by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. When the expulsion mandate was decreed, Sultan Beyazid II (1481-1512) of the Ottoman Empire issued a formal invitation for Jews to join his kingdom, and many settled in Constantinople. It is impossible to know when this manuscript departed Spain along with its owner, but it may have ended up in Constantinople as a result of this invitation.

This manuscript is a biblical codex, or in Hebrew, a *mahzor*, as opposed to a Torah scroll. Hebrew codices first became popular among Jewish communities in the tenth century for a number of reasons. Whereas rabbinic law prohibits the insertion of vowels and cantillation marks in Torah scrolls, these helpful reading guides, as well as the *Masorah*, could be added to

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<sup>4</sup> Brentano's manuscript info insert (found in back of manuscript).

<sup>5</sup> "The People in the Books: Hebraica and Judaica Manuscripts from Columbia University Libraries," Columbia University Libraries, accessed March 13, 2015, [https://exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/hebrew\\_mss/scholars](https://exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/hebrew_mss/scholars).

codices. The pages of codices are written on both sides, as opposed to the single-sided Torah scroll, which saved on expensive materials. Searching the text was also rendered easier by the ability to leaf through pages.<sup>6</sup>

In accordance with rabbinic law, public reading in Jewish synagogues must be done from a Torah scroll – a codex is unacceptable. As such, biblical codices were used for study and to preserve the reading tradition by private individuals.<sup>7</sup> The notes and drawings in the margins of this manuscript confirm that it was used for personal religious study.

As mentioned earlier, each page is decorated with ornate designs created out of the *Masorah* written in minute Hebrew letters. This scribal art form is called micrography. It was a common artistic element in Oriental (Near East and Egypt) and Spanish Bibles. The earliest extant examples of this technique come from Egypt and Israel/Palestine in the tenth century, but since no manuscripts dated earlier have been preserved, we cannot confirm when the style first developed.<sup>8</sup>

Micrography was often used in biblical codices, since unlike Torah scrolls, books were not subject to the strict rabbinic rules that dictated textual arrangements.<sup>9</sup> A decorated codex could be the responsibility of multiple craftsmen: a *sofer* (scribe) who wrote out the biblical text, a *nakdan* (vocalizer) responsible for inserting vowels, accents, and cantillation, and a *masran* (masorator) who specialized in copying the *Masorah* into biblical codices. In some instances, however, all three of these tasks were performed by a single scribe.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "The Bible and its Transmission – Scrolls, Manuscripts, Printings," The Aleppo Codex Online, accessed March 13, 2015, <http://www.aleppocodex.org/links/7.html>.

<sup>7</sup> "The Bible and its Transmission."

<sup>8</sup> Dalia-Ruth Halperin, *Illuminating in Micrography: The Catalan Micrography Mahzor-MS Hebrew 8o 6527 in the National Library of Israel* (N.P.: Brill, 2013), 1.

<sup>9</sup> "Micrography: The Hebrew Word as Art," The Jewish Theological Seminary Website, accessed March 13, 2015, <https://www.jtsa.edu/prebuilt/exhib/microg/index.shtml>.

<sup>10</sup> "Illuminated Manuscripts, Hebrew," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed March 13, 2015, [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0009\\_0\\_09500.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0009_0_09500.html).

Some scholars have argued that there is link between the content of the *Masorah* chosen create specific designs and the designs themselves, but this is difficult to prove since it depends largely on interpretation. If in some cases intentionality was expressed in this way, it was rare – most micrographical forms are simply adornments.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from the micrography, the other particularly fascinating feature of this manuscript is the triangular text which concludes 2 Chronicles. The verses read:

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah was fulfilled, the Lord roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his realm by the word of mouth and in writing as follows:

Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has charged me with building Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Anyone of you of all His people – may his God be with him, and let him go up.<sup>12</sup>

By dedicating an entire page and unique design to these two verses, the scribe who wrote this manuscript seems to have wanted to highlight the Babylonian exile and the eventual return of the Jews to Israel at the decree of Cyrus of Persia – but why? As noted before, vellum was expensive, and one can tell by how close-together the words are written throughout the manuscript, that space limitations were indeed a concern. As such, dedicating an entire page to two verses of script would not have been done haphazardly.

The reason may have been related to the original owner's family background. The inscription in the front page of the manuscript mentions Rabbi Samuel Nehardea, from whom the owner Rabbi Abraham appears to have descended. Samuel of Nehardea (165-257 CE) was a famous Jewish Talmudist from the town Nehardea in Babylonia. The special reference to Babylon in the manuscript may be related to the family's personal history. Another more moving possibility is that the creators of this manuscript equated their experience of Jewish persecution, which led to mass Jewish emigration from Spain well before the official expulsion

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<sup>11</sup> Halperin, *Illuminating in Micrography*, 17-18.

<sup>12</sup> JPS translation.

in the fifteenth century, with the Babylonian exile, recalling Cyrus's words as a beacon of hope that perhaps they too, might one day be able to return home.

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