

PREFACE

Medieval Spain was extremely fertile ground for cultural exchange between ethnic groups, religions, and countries. Each of the kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula—Al-Andalus, the Crown of Aragon, Navarre, Castile, and Portugal—had Muslim, Christian, and Jewish inhabitants. The peninsula's unique political situation engendered encounters between these different cultures, and the results can be found in abundance in literature, philosophy, and science. In this setting, Jewish art, which by nature is eclectic and yet has its own forms and messages, developed a unique character. It absorbed attributes of Islamic and Christian art, which fused with Jewish artistic tradition and Jewish written tradition translated into visual messages. This variegated culture was further enriched by influences from France, with which the countries had political relations. Its horizons were also widened by international trade, as can be seen, for example, in its echoes of Italian style.

All of these aspects—Islamic and Christian art, Jewish tradition, and external influences—come to the fore in the decoration of Hebrew Bibles produced in Spain in the Middle Ages. This book, first published in Hebrew in 2001, is an attempt to compile the history of the illuminated Bibles of Spain and define the characteristics of the various schools of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries in different parts of the Iberian Peninsula. Still, it should not be viewed as a comprehensive survey or a complete catalogue of the illuminated Bibles of Spain. Rather than striving to review or catalogue a maximal number of books, the discussion centers on the manner in which the encounter between the cultures contributed to the development of the art of the Hebrew book.

A note should be added regarding the transliteration of Hebrew names and terms. Where English versions of Hebrew names exist, they are used throughout the text. Where transliteration was necessary, I used a system that is easily readable, on the one hand, but makes clear distinctions between similar sounds, on the other. The letter *chet* is therefore transliterated as *ch*, instead of *h*, to distinguish it from *he*; *khaf* is transliterated as *kh* to distinguish it from *chet*; *kuf* is transliterated as *q* to distinguish it from *k*, which stands for *kaf*;

the letter *tsade* is transliterated as *ts*, since this is phonetically the closest sound.

For the translation of primary sources, I relied on academic translations whenever available. References to the latter are given in the footnotes. In cases where the translations diverge from the Hebrew original, they have been modified. In some cases, translations have been altered also for the sake of consistent terminology, especially in texts that discuss the Temple implements.

The following chapters spring from a lecture delivered in February 1997 at the annual conference of the College Art Association in New York, in a session devoted to the subject “Spain before Spain”—that is, before the merger of the Crown of Aragon and Castile at the end of the fifteenth century. I would like to thank Pamela Patton, who organized the session, and Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo, who moderated the discussion, for their comments and ideas. I am also indebted to John Williams, whose extensive knowledge of the arts in Spain served as a constant source of inspiration, especially in the two years that I spent as a research associate at the University of Pittsburgh.

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