

6. חמשה חומשי תורה [*Pentateuch*]. Antwerp: Christopher Plantin, 1573-1574. Volumes I-III.

A miniature Hebrew Pentateuch renowned for its superb type-setting, printed by Christopher Plantin, one of the great printers of the 16th century and best-known for his Polygot Bible, *Biblia Regia*. Plantin acquired some of his beautiful Hebrew fonts directly from Daniel Bomberg, a native of Antwerp who returned to his hometown in 1539 though his press remained active in Venice till 1548.

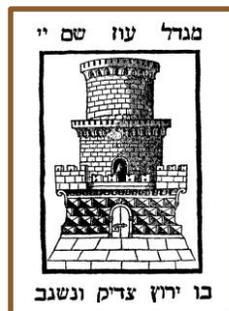
7. תורה נביאים וכתובים [*Torah, Prophets and Writings*]. Amsterdam: Menashe ben Israel, 1636.

Amsterdam was a bustling new center of Jewish life when a youthful Menashe ben Israel, later to become famous for his efforts to readmit the Jews into England, printed this complete edition of the Hebrew Bible.

8. חמשה חומשי תורה [*Pentateuch*]. Berlin: Soncino Gesellschaft, 1933.

A bibliophile edition of the Hebrew Pentateuch printed in Berlin on the very eve of the Holocaust. The printer's device on the title page bears the ubiquitous tower of the original Soncino press, famed in the late 15th and 16th centuries for its Hebrew books. The lovely fonts were modeled after the letters used by Gershom Cohen in early 16th-century Prague.

The long-awaited publication of this Pentateuch coincided with the consolidation of Nazi power in Germany, and against this dark background the first and last verses of the Blessing of Moses, so boldly printed in red here, take on a special significance: "Your enemies shall dwindle away before you. You shall tread upon their high places" (Deuteronomy 33:29).



The printer's device of the original Soncino Press, adapted for the Pentateuch printed in Berlin, 1933.

Presents

A Display of Rare Bibles Accompanying the Talk:

From Text to Image: Illumination as Visual Commentary

Israeli artist *Avner Moriah* discusses his journey through the Bible



Detail from *בראשית* [*Genesis*] by Avner Moriah (Checklist no. 1).
Hebraic Section, African and Middle Eastern Division, Library of Congress.

Thursday, November 17, 2016

12:00 noon – 1:00 p.m.

Library of Congress
African and Middle Eastern Division,
Thomas Jefferson Building LJ 220 (2nd floor)
Washington, D.C.

Starkly black-and-white, on paper or vellum, the Bible has been a constant focus of creativity through the ages, inviting scholars, poets, artists, and dreamers to fill in the gaps, flesh out the details, and delve into its meanings. Today's speaker is one of those artists, and today's display a tribute to his unique vision of the biblical text. Avner Moriah is one of the best-known and widely-collected artists in Israel today, his exquisite illuminations offering a visual commentary to the Bible that is both striking and multi-layered. It is a privilege to welcome him to the Library of Congress, and we hope that you will enjoy this opportunity of seeing his beautiful works of art together with rare examples of the biblical texts that inspired him.

- Ann Brener, Hebraic Section

Checklist of Items on Display

I. Works by Avner Moriah

1. בראשית [*Genesis*]. Artist's book with illuminations by Avner Moriah and calligraphy by Yitshak Pludwinski. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Fine Arts Print Workshop, 2010. Watercolor and gouache on paper. Elephant folio with leather slipcase. 11 of 100 signed and numbered copies.

An artist's book containing the entire Hebrew text of the Book of Genesis, handwritten by Yitshak Pludwinski. The illustrations by Avner Moriah, often inspired by classic rabbinic legend and commentary, display the artist's distinctly personal style. As Yair Zakovitch, Professor of Bible at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem writes in the Preface to the book: "[Moriah's] figures are identifiable but stylized, their genetic roots tangled. In them, one hears both the familiar greetings from the art of the ancient Near East as well as from the modern world." Here the book is open to the image of Jacob's dream, with the angels ascending and descending the ladder that goes up to the heavens (Genesis 28: 10-16).

2. The first two pages from a forthcoming artist's edition of שמות [*Exodus*] with illuminations by Avner Moriah and calligraphy by Yitshak Pludwinski. Watercolor and gouache on paper. Elephant folio.

A unique opportunity to peek into Moriah's forthcoming edition of Exodus. Here the artist treats us to four vignettes from the first chapter of Exodus, all executed in glorious color and detail. In one vignette, for example, we see Pharaoh consulting with the two Egyptian midwives (beautifully dressed in embroidered robes), while just outside the palace doors the Nile streams peacefully by, two bright green crocodiles frolicking playfully in its waters.

3. מגלת אסתר [*The Scroll of Esther*]. Jerusalem, ca. 2003. Limited-edition scroll on paper with illuminations by Avner Moriah and calligraphy by Avraham-Hersh Borshevsky.

One of four different Scrolls of Esther created by Moriah over a period of two years. As the artist notes, "Each of my Scrolls of Esther is like a storyboard of a play, broken up into various segments that impart to the viewer a sense of drama, while relaying a visual interpretation of the written text." In this limited-edition scroll, images and colors reminiscent of medieval Persian art convey the historical background of the biblical story while creating rich layers of meaning drawn from traditional rabbinic interpretations of the text. The Hebrew was hand-lettered by Ukrainian-born calligrapher Avraham-Hersh Borshevsky, who received his artistic training in the Ukraine. He now lives in Israel where he is a professional Torah scribe and expert in Jewish scribal arts.

II. Rare Editions of the Hebrew Bible

4. מקראות גדולות [*First Rabbinic Bible*]. Venice: Daniel Bomberg, 1516-17. Volume I of IV: the Torah [Five Books of Moses].

Printed by the fabled Daniel Bomberg in Venice, this *First Rabbinic Bible* was first in many ways: the first printed Bible to include the ancient *masorah* and the first Hebrew Bible to use chapter and verse headings. The edition, however, was sharply criticized, and it was left to the *Second Rabbinic Bible* published by Bomberg in 1525 to set the standard for all subsequent editions. One contemporary authority, the renowned Elias Levita, sniffed that "the editor [of this first Rabbinic Bible] did not know his right hand from his left" and sternly bade his readers to pay no attention to "the false remarks printed in the margins." Open here to the Book of Numbers with woodcuts of the initial word both in Hebrew and in Aramaic translation.

5. פירוש התורה [*Commentary on the Pentateuch*]. With Targum Onkelos and commentaries by Rashi, Nachmanides, and Abraham ibn Ezra. Constantinople: Samuel ibn David Nahmias, 1522. Elephant folio.

This folio-sized Pentateuch with commentaries was printed by the scion of David and Samuel ibn Nahmias, two brothers who fled from Spain and settled in Constantinople following the expulsions from the Iberian Peninsula. The two brothers set up a Hebrew press in 1493, thereby becoming the first printers in the Ottoman Empire in any language. This Pentateuch was printed in two editions: one with the extra biblical readings (*Haftarot*) according to the Karaite rite; the other (on display here) according to the Sephardic rite.

(continued on back)