

A hitherto unknown edition of the Spanish Psalter by Abraham Usque (Ferrara 1554)

Aron di Leone LEONI

The Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele in Rome owns a priceless Psalter in Spanish printed in 1554 by A[braham] U[sque]¹:

*PSALTERIO / de Dauid trasladado en / español cō toda fieli-
dad verbo de verbo / de su verdade-/ra origen: y / Repartido /
como se / deue / leer / Per cada dia del / mes segun vso / de los
An-/tiguos. / Estampado en Ferrara a 15 / de Henero 1554².*

According to the library catalogue, the volume was produced by Abraham «Olschki». The clerk who compiled the card was convinced that this was the «Italian name» of the printer³. The erroneous entry probably prevented scholars from locating this book up until now.

The volume, in 16°, is printed in gothic types (from the same font used for the famous *Biblia en lengua Española*), and is made up of 225 [+ 6] leaves. Each page bears 17 lines plus a heading indicating the number of the Psalm and the day when it has to be

¹ The initials of Abraham Vsque appear in the final page, at the base of the printer's mark portraying an armillary sphere (See plate 4). I am indebted to Dr. Giuliana Sciascia for her help in the research.

² '*Psalter by David translated word for word with utmost fidelity from its true source. Arranged for lecture for every day of the month according to the rite of ancient [Spanish Jews]. Printed in Ferrara on January the 15th 1554*' (See plate 2).

³ Curiously enough, the clerk confused the name of the Portuguese printer with that of the Olschki Family, the owners of a well-known publishing house in Florence.

P S A L T E R I V M
 De David en Hebrayco
 dicho Thebylin, trasla-
 dado cō toda fidelidad
 verbo de verbo del
 Hebrayco: y
 Repartido
 Spectatō como se *Biblicorum*
P. P. Rayon: deve leer *J. Anni Caroz*
 Ver cada dia del
 mes segun vso
 de los An-
 - nios.
~~1553~~
 Estampado en Ferrara a. 19.
 103 de Noviembre. 1553.
 Donum Dni *Benedicti Zyl*

Plate 1

Title page of the *Psalterium de David (Editio princeps)* by Abraham Usque
 (Ferrara 1553) (Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of
 New York).

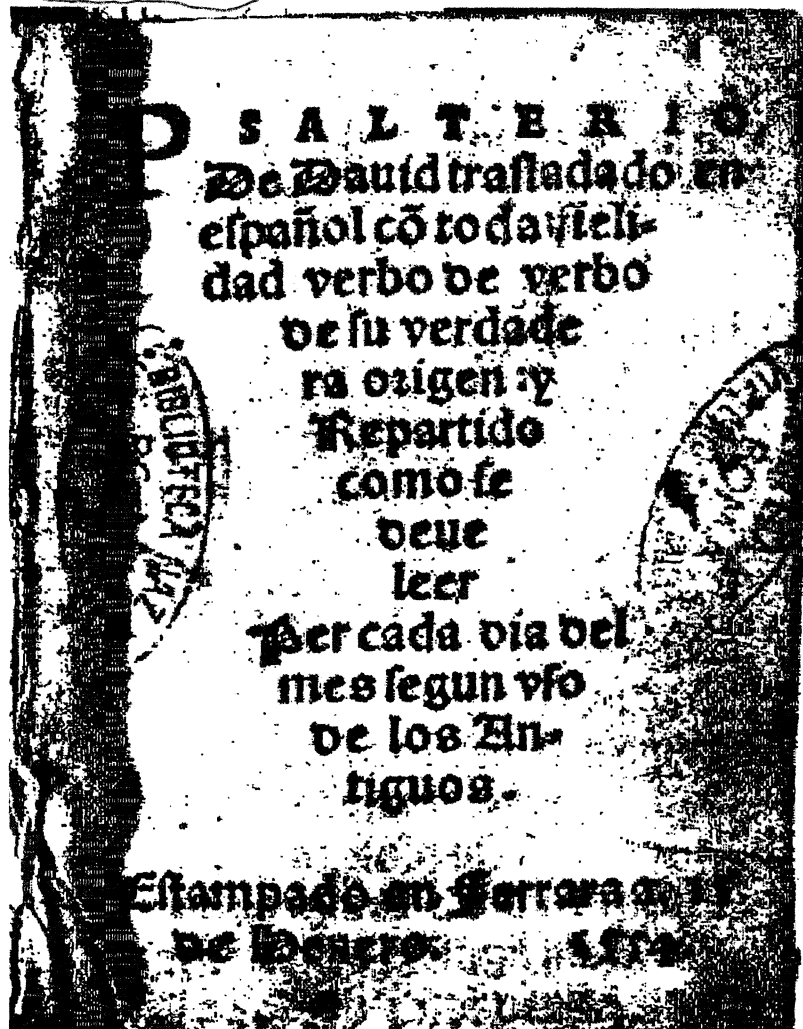


Plate 2

Title page of the hitherto unknown *Psalterio de David* by Abraham Usque (Ferrara 1554) (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele in Rome).

read («segun uso de los Antiguos») ⁴. An Appendix of 7 unnumbered leaves comprises a «Tabla» (with the alphabetical index of psalms, according to their Spanish titles) ⁵, a «Prologo al lector» ⁶ and the printer's mark (without any date or wording) ⁷.

It is the matter of a hitherto unknown second edition of the Spanish *Psalter* issued by Abraham Usque on November 15, 1553 under a slightly different title:

Psalterivm / de Daud en Hebrayco / dicho Thehylim, trasladado cō toda fielidad / verbo de verbo del / Hebrayco : y / Repartido / como se / deue / leer / Per cada dia del / mes segun vso / de los An-/tiguos. / Estampado en Ferrara a. 15. / de Nouiembre 1553 ⁸.

Of the *editio princeps* one only copy is known to survive, in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York ⁹.

For the sake of simplicity we shall hereafter indicate the first edition as *Psalterium* and the second one as *Psalterio*, according to their titles.

Apart from the title-pages, the two editions are substantially identical and differ only in minor details. We compared, for instance, the two versions of the «Prologo al lector». In the *Psalterium*, in the first line of the «Prologo», the author conveys his wishes to the public: «Abram aben vsque. S[alutem et] B[enedictionem]». For some reason this line was omitted in the *Psalterio* and was not replaced by other words. Negligible differences such as the distance of a comma from the preceding word or the size of a capital letter are frequent.

Evidently, the success of the *editio princeps* was so striking and unexpected that it was necessary to print a new *Psalter* within few weeks. The text of the *Psalterio* had to be set anew. This suggests

⁴ On page 1v, on the other side of the title-page, instructions are given for those willing to read the whole *Psalter* in one week (See plate 3).

⁵ Fasc. Ff: (unnumbered) ff. 1r-4v.

⁶ Fasc. Ff: (unnumbered) ff. 5r-6r.

⁷ Fasc. Ff: (unnumbered) f. 6v. The last leaf (ff. 7r-7v) is unprinted.

⁸ See plate 1.

⁹ The *Psalterium* was reprinted in 1628 by Abraham Sury in Amsterdam. See C. ROTH, «The Marrano Press in Ferrara, 1552-1555», *Modern Language Review* 37 (1943) pp. 307-317: p. 313; Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *A Jewish Classic in the Portuguese Language, Estudo introdutório to Consolação as Tribolações de Israel, Edição de Ferrara 1553* (reprint Lisboa 1989) p. 120.

that the Sefardic settlement of Ferrara was rather important and there was wide interest in this sort of publications.

The «Prologo al lector» provides some hitherto unnoticed information on Abraham Usque and his contribution to the *Biblia en lengua Española*: he points out that he was a member of the team who translated the Bible alongside with eminent scholars. He also states that all the previous latin translations were consulted ¹⁰.

Usque furthermore explains that his *Psalter*, printed in pocket size, was derived from the *Biblia en lengua Española* but he claims that the text had been revised and amended again.

Abram aben vsque S[alutem et] B[enedictionem] ¹¹.

Despues que los passados dias, curioso letor, fuy en la traslacion de la Biblia en lengua español con muy sabios y expertos letrados hebraycos confrontando empero en todo con las traslaciones latinias que fasta aqui salieron a luz Con las quales tambien fallaran conforme esta presente del psalterio como cosa sacada della, revista cõtado seconda vez y de nuevo enmẽdada: la qual quis deduzir en tan pequeño volumen que facilmente, como per Joel ¹², se pueda traer en el seno.

The facts presented in the «Prologo» are significant as Usque had been regarded up to now as a modest artisan involved in the mere work of printing ¹³. Elena Romero ¹⁴ was perhaps the first to ascribe more importance to his role. Y. H. Yerushalmi stated that, in effect, Abraham was both printer and publisher as he (at times) employed press workers and editors ¹⁵.

¹⁰ H. P. SALOMON, *Deux Etudes Portugaises - Two Portuguese Studies* (Braga 1991) pp. 54-55.

¹¹ This line is found in the 1553 *Psalterium* but it was omitted in the 1554 edition. Cfr. SALOMON *Deux Etudes* p. 54, plate 4a.

¹² This is perhaps a reference to an unknown edition of the Book of *Joel*.

¹³ R. SEGRE, «Contribución documental a la historia de la imprenta Usque y de su edición de la Biblia», in *Introducción a la Biblia de Ferrara, Actas del Simposio Internacional ... Sevilla 1991*, ed. I. M. HASSÁN (Madrid 1994) pp. 205-228: p. 216. The author describes Abraham as «un tipógrafo con una modesta disponibilidad financiera y menores relaciones sociales y culturales». The part of this article devoted to Jeronimo Vargas must be consulted with caution as the author did not realize that Jeronimo was Yomtob Atias' son (and not his *alias*).

¹⁴ E. ROMERO, *La creación literaria en lengua sefardí* (Madrid 1992) p. 46. The authoress was probably the first to state that Abram was not only a printer but also one of the editors of the *Biblia de Ferrara*.

¹⁵ YERUSHALMI *A Jewish Classic* p. 93.

The author of these notes does not venture an opinion on Abraham's claim to have introduced revisions and changes of the text. His statements might reveal previous disagreements with other editors or could simply express the desire to faithfully respect the meaning of the sacred texts. However, in the ensuing part of the «Prologo» he confirmed the aim, already expressed in the *Biblia*¹⁶, to follow «de verbo a verbo» the form and order of the Hebrew text even if the elegance of the *modern* Spanish language was lost in the process¹⁷:

Y trabaje siempre seguir quasi en todo el phrasis Hebrayco por no salir del senso que cada sutil ingenio en el alcansasse. Aunque claro conosco parecera rudo corejandolo con el moderno español. Mas quise antes tener respeto a la vera trasladacion y origen de donde trasladava, que a la pulidez de la lengua español en que trasladava.

Furthermore, the author explains that the name of God is rendered by the initial «.A.» and is read as *Adonay* ('The Lord'):

Notara el letor que fallando .A. diga Señor, por que se pone por el santo nombre Tet[r]agramaton.

The same rules had been stated in 1553 by the editors of the *Biblia de Ferrara*¹⁸ and were tacitly enforced by Ysac Cavallero in his *Orden de oraciones* published in Venice towards 1552¹⁹. How

¹⁶ *Biblia en lengua Española*, Prólogo «Al letor» (f. *2r/(II)a). Cfr. Iacob M. HASSÁN, «Dos introducciones de la Biblia de Ferrara», in *Introducción a la Biblia de Ferrara* pp. 13-66: pp. 40-41.

¹⁷ M. MORREALE, «El Sidur Ladinado de 1552», *Romance Philology* 17/2 (1963) pp. 332-338: p. 334; H. P. SALOMON, «The "Last Trial" in Portuguese», in *Studi sull'Ebraismo Italiano in memoria di Cecil Roth*, ed. E. TOAFF (Roma 1974) pp. 159-185: pp. 162-163; SALOMON *Deux Etudes Portugaises* pp. 54-55; H. V. SEPHIHA, *Le Ladino, judeo-español calque: Deutéronome, versions de Constantinople (1547) et de Ferrare (1553)* (Paris 1973); H. den BOER, «La Biblia de Ferrara y otras traducciones españolas de la Biblia entre los sefardíes de origen converso», in *Introducción a la Biblia de Ferrara* pp. 251-296: pp. 252-258.

¹⁸ *Biblia de Ferrara*, Prólogo «Al letor», f. *2v/[II]b: «Y hallaran tambien una .A. con dos puntos el qual es señal del Santo nombre del Señor Tetragramaton». See HASSÁN *Dos introducciones* pp. 42-43; YERUSHALMI *A Jewish Classic* pp. 86-87.

¹⁹ The complete title is: סדור תפלות / כמנהג הספרדים הועתק מלשון עברי / ללשון ספרד / טוב קאבאלירו בניציה / על ידי הרופא המובהק רבי / יצחק ב"ר שם טוב קאבאלירו בניציה / *Orden de oraciones / segundo el uso ebrèo en lengua / ebraica y vulgar español: / traduzido por el dotor Isac fijo / de Don Sem tob Cavallero: / EN VENECIA*. On the dating of the Siddurim printed by Ysac Cavallero see the discussion in A. di Leone LEONI, «La

ever, in the *Psalterio* the name of the Lord is also rendered by the abbreviation «.D.»²⁰ or even by «Dio»²¹.

By comparing the rendering of some psalms in the *Biblia* and in the *Psalterio*, it becomes evident that the text of the latter is derived from the *Biblia* «como cosa sacada dela»²². The design framing the first letter of Psalm 1 is the same as that one printed in the *Biblia* a few months earlier²³. Also the «Tabla» is taken from there²⁴.

There are however minor differences. For instance, while in the *Biblia* the words ונתורתו יהוה (Psalm 1, verse 2) are translated: 'y en su ley fablara', Abraham chose to render it as 'y en su ley pensara'. The same difference occurs in the rendering of Psalm 2, verse 1.

At the end of the «Prologo», Abraham expressed his purpose to publish the works of Salomon in the same form and *language* used for the *Psalterio*, provided that this book would obtain the favour of the public. We do not know whether he eventually succeeded in carrying out this plan.

In 1555 he issued the *Orden de Oraciones de mes arreo* of which only one copy is known to survive²⁵. We do not know whether, in the meantime, he had published other liturgical works in Spanish: if he did so, no copies of these volumes are known to be extant.

Between 1555 and 1558 Abraham Usque apparently printed only Hebrew books (which we do not take here into consideration). His activities in Ferrara came to an end towards 1559.

presenza sefardita a Venezia intorno alla metà del Cinquecento. I libri e gli uomini», *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* (in press).

²⁰ See, for instance, *Psalterio*, Psalm 3, f. 4r: «Muchos dizientes por mi alma no salvacion a el e nel .D., סלה». סלה is the only word in Hebrew letters found in the *Psalterio*.

²¹ The word «Dio» (scrupulously singular) occurs frequently also in the *Biblia*. See for instance the section of the «Tabla» devoted to the *Psalms*.

²² *Psalterio*, Appendix [Fasc. FFii], «Prologo» (unnumbered) f. 5v.

²³ *Biblia* de Ferrara, h. 277b, column 1: «*Tehilim* .s. [= a saber] *Psalterio*». The design depicts a scene of grape treading.

²⁴ *Psalterio*, Appendix: «Tabla del Psalterio segun cuento de los psalmos» (where reference is made to the number of each psalm and not to the pages).

²⁵ A. USQUE, *Orden de Oraciones de mes arreo s: [= a saber] sin boltar de vna a otra parte. y la orden de Hanucah, Purim, y Pascuas de Pesah, Sebuoth, y Sucoth* (Ferrara 1555). The book was reprinted in Venice by Pietro e Lorenzo Bragadini in 1622. Cfr. LEONI «La presenza sefardita a Venezia».

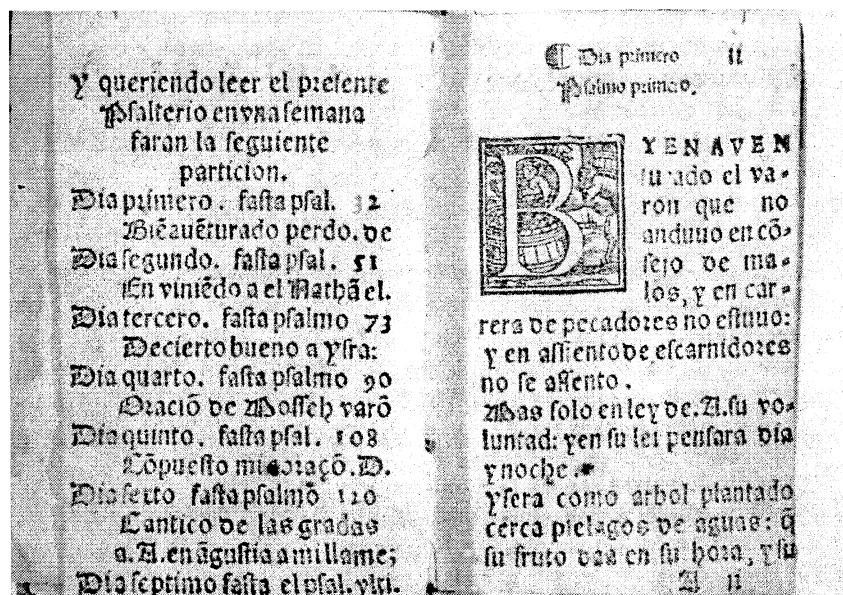


Plate 3

Psalterio de David by Abraham Usque: On the left (f. 1v): instructions for those willing to read the whole *Psalter* in one week. On the right (f. 2r): Psalm 1 (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele in Rome).



Plate 4

Psalterio de David by Abraham Usque, Appendix (unnumbered f. 6v): The printer's mark (Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele in Rome).

Scholars wondered whether Abraham and Samuel Usque were linked by any family relationship. We can now state that they were neither brothers nor father and son. In fact, Abraham described himself as the son of Selomoh ²⁶. In 1552 Samuel affixed his signature to a notary deed ²⁷ and declared to be «filius quondam Abraham». He was not obviously the son of *our* printer who was well alive at the time.

RESUMEN

En la Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele de Roma se conserva un *Salterio* en español publicado en 1554 por Abraham Usque. Se trata de una segunda edición hasta ahora desconocida de su *Psalterium* impreso en Ferrara en 1553. Por su «Prologo» sabemos que Abraham Usque no actuó sólo como un mero impresor sino que también participó en la edición y fue uno de los traductores del libro. En dicho «Prologo» afirma asimismo que, junto con otros eminentes eruditos, había trabajado en la traducción de la *Biblia en lengua Española* (Ferrara 1553).

SUMMARY

The Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele in Roma owns a Psalter in Spanish published in 1554 by Abraham Usque. It is the matter of a hitherto unknown second edition of the *Psalterium* printed in Ferrara in 1553. From the «Prologo» we learn that Abraham Usque was not only a simple printer but also the editor and one of the translators of this book. He also stated to have worked at the translation of the *Biblia en lengua Española* (Ferrara 1553) together with eminent scholars.

²⁶ Title page of מחרור *Orden / De Roshasanah y Ki-/pur trasladado en es-/pañol y de nuevo emẽ-/dado por yndustria y / diligẽcia de Abraham Usque / Bẽ Selomoh / Usque Portugues y / estampado em su casa / y a su costa / En Ferrara 15 d / Elul / 5313 [= August 25, 1553].*

²⁷ Archivio di Stato di Ferrara, Notarile Antico, Notary G. B. Saracco, Matr. 534, Pacco 5, pp. 114r-115v: Last wills of Simcha Natam, Lusitanian.