RASHI’S MAP OF THE LAND OF CANAAN, CA. 1100, AND ITS CARTOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

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The presence of maps in medieval Hebrew manuscripts has been almost totally overlooked by students of medieval cartography. For instance, in the multivolume History of Cartography edited by J. B. Harley and David Woodward, which surveys and discusses the development of cartography from antiquity onwards, from pre-Columbian America to the realm of Islam to aboriginal Australia, there is not even an allusion to the existence of medieval Hebrew maps.

Students of Jewish history, on the other hand, have repeatedly dealt with maps or diagrams that appear in the most influential Jewish commentary on the Pentateuch, that by Rashi (acronym for Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaqi), who lived mainly in Troyes, France, between 1040 and 1105. Abraham Berliner, who edited Rashi’s commentary in 1866, observed that three of the manuscripts on which he based his edition—namely, those of the Leiden and Munich libraries and of the Saraval collection—contain, within the framework of the discussion of the Book of Numbers, chapter 34, “drawings of the Land [of Israel] considered necessary for Rashi’s commentary.” (Fig. 1) Berliner went on to say that since Rashi’s grandson and pupil Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (ca. 1080—after 1158) had stated that “my grandfather wrote a commentary and drew borders,” it would appear that Rashi himself, too, made drawings of the Land’s borders to elucidate his commentary with their help. Berliner’s remark that Rashi, too, may have drawn borders suggests that Berliner did not believe the drawings in the three manuscripts necessarily originated with Rashi. In any case, he did not reproduce these drawings in his edition.

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1 My thanks to the participants of the Vancouver conference, and especially to Professor Patrick Gautier Dalché, for their comments and criticism.
2 Abraham Berliner, ed., Rashi on the Pentateuch (Berlin, 1866), 300, n. 5 at Num. 34:3 [in Hebrew].
Nine years later, in 1875, Moritz Steinschneider observed, in his catalogue of the Hebrew manuscripts of the Royal and State Library of Munich, that MS 5, copied in 1213, is one of the most important manuscripts of Rashi’s commentary, and that it contains, on folio 140, “a plan of [the Land of] Canaan.” In the catalogue’s second edition, published in 1895, Steinschneider gave the manuscript’s correct date, 1233.

In 1944, Zev Vilnay in his book *The Hebrew Map of the Land of Israel*, written in Hebrew, presented the “diagrams” in Rashi’s commentary as the earliest attempt in Hebrew writings to visually represent the Land of Israel. From the statement by Rashi’s grandson quoted above, Vilnay assumed that Rashi himself had drawn these diagrams and, relying on Steinschneider’s catalogue, he drew atten-