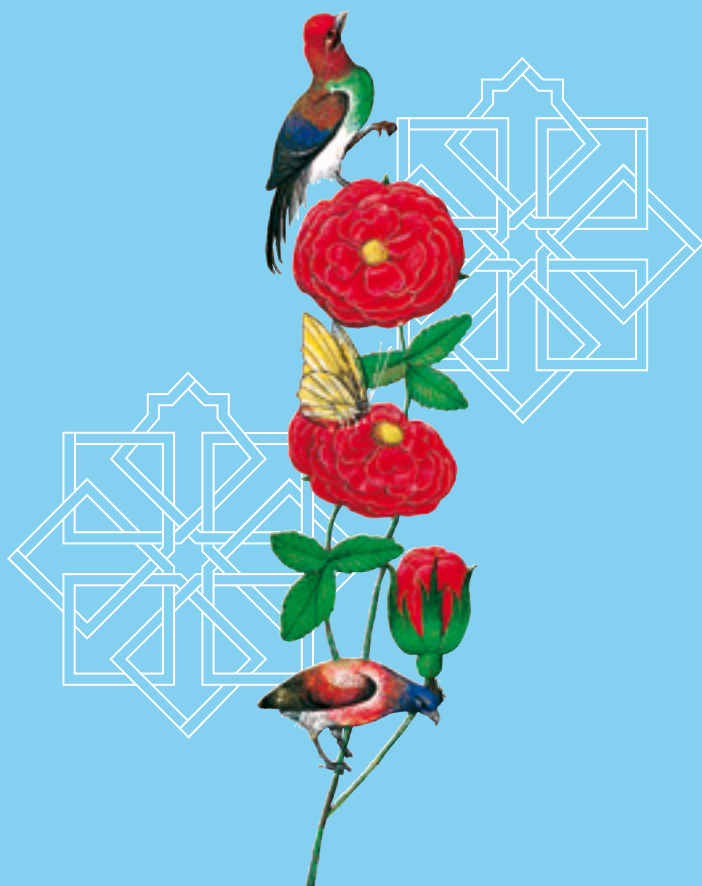


THE ISABELLA BREVIARY

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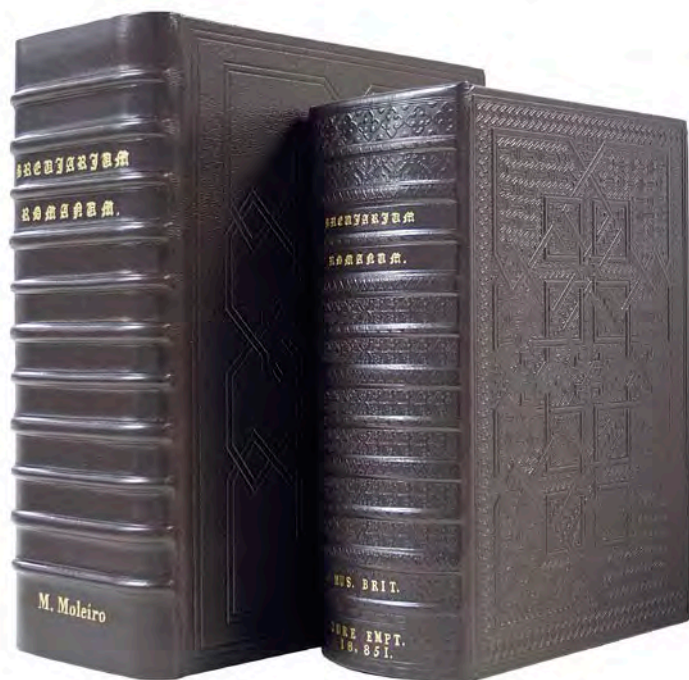
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THE ISABELLA BREVIARY

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"The Isabella Breviary is one of the gems of the British Library's vast collection of illuminated manuscripts, reflecting both the artistic and political history of its day. (...) this transaction ranks as one of the most significant purchases of illuminated books in the entire history of the British Museum and Library."

Janet Backhouse (†),

Former curator of illuminated manuscripts in the British Library



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f. 174r, Pharaoh's soldiers
overwhelmed by the Red Sea.



f. 177v, Adam and Eve cast out
of Paradise.



f. 191v, David and Goliath.

Conceived of as the most luxurious Flemish breviary, with each page masterfully illuminated by the finest Flemish painters: the Master of the Dresden Prayerbook, Gerard Horenbout, Gerard David, etc. An outstandingly magnificent manuscript of peerless beauty. Having more texts than a book of hours, the breviary allows illuminators more artistic license, resulting in a greater variety of images.



Isabella the Catholic was given the manuscript in 1497 by her ambassador Francisco de Rojas on the occasion of the double marriage of her children, the Infante John of Asturias and Infanta Joanna, to the children of emperor Maximilian of Austria and duchess Mary of Burgundy, Margaret and Philip.

- Shelf mark: Add. Ms. 18851.
- Date: last decade of the 15th c.
- Provenance: Flanders.
- Size: 230 x 160 mm.
- 1046 pages, all illuminated.
- Bound in embossed, brown Morocco leather.
- Full-colour commentary volume by Elisa Ruiz (Emeritus Professor of Palaeography, Universidad Complutense de Madrid), Nigel Morgan (Honorary Professor of the History of Art, University of Cambridge) and Scot McKendrick (Head of Western Manuscripts at the British Library).



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APOLOGY OF THE CORONATION OF QUEEN ISABELLA, f. 437r.

The crowning of Our Lady

The image is the work of Gérard Horenbout. The most important aspect of this miniature is its symbolism because in addition to its appropriateness amongst the images of a breviary, Our Lady's crowning is important as confirmation of the coronation of Isabella herself. When Isabella's brother, Henry IV of Castile, died on December 11th 1474, she proclaimed herself queen that very day, setting her at loggerheads with her niece, Joanna the Beltraneja, in a civil war that was to last four years.

The painting shows the Holy Trinity crowning Our Lady. The Father and the Son, sharing the same throne and both with a sceptre, hold the crown. Between them, above the throne, is the Holy Ghost shown as a dove. Francisco de Rojas gives the queen the codex with the following words inscribed in gold upon the brown ground of the decorative border:

*Diue Elisabeth,
Hispaniarum et
Sicilie (sic) Regine, etc.
christianissime, potentissime, semper
auguste, supreme domine
sue clementissime
Franciscus de Rojas,
eiusdem maiestatis
humilimus seruus ac
creatura, optime
de se merens
breviarium hoc ex
obsequio obtulit.*

To Isabella the divine,
Queen of the Spains
and of Sicily, your
most Christian, powerful,
ever august and most clement
supreme lady,
I, Francisco de Rojas,
your humble servant
and creature of your majesty
herself,
deserving of the very most,
do give you this breviary

The breviary was undeniably a splendid gift, the best possible, not only because of the first-rate technique and artistry of its images but also because of its political significance and because it is the best symbol of the culmination of a political project on a world scale. Miniatures like this one of the coronation demonstrate not only how important the events following the death of Henry IV were to Isabella (her efforts to obtain the crown and her yearning to be acknowledged by her subjects), but also the determined desire to unify the Iberian Peninsula that characterised her reign.



APOLOGY OF THE CONQUEST OF GRANADA IN 1492, f. 173r.

Abraham saves Lot and is rewarded by Melchizedek

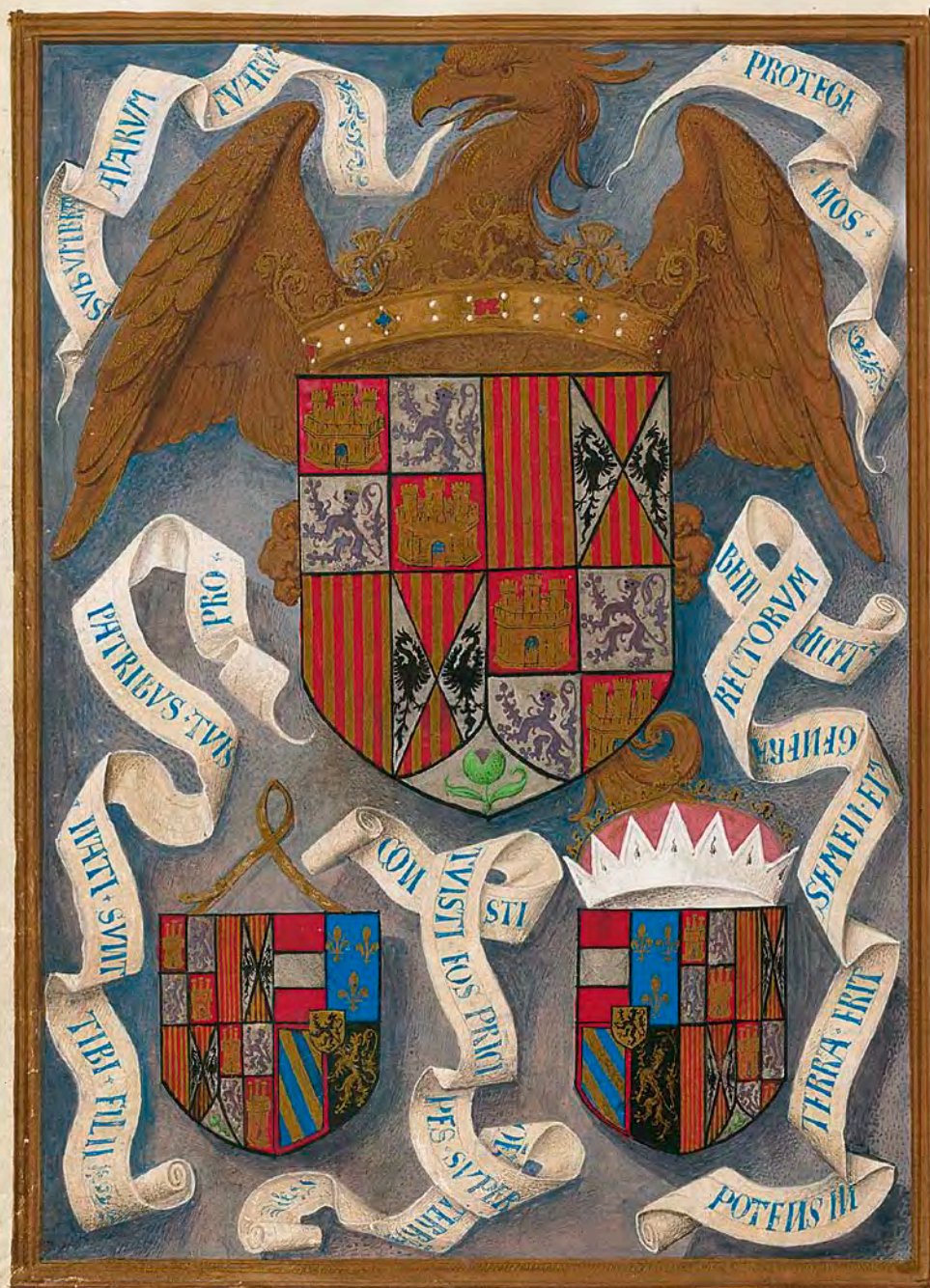
This painting of Psalm 109 may be interpreted as the protection of God and a prefiguration of the Messiah as a king and priest. The Holy Trinity is shown overhead in a rather unusual form: God the Father, on the right with a papal tiara, holds the orb, whilst God the Son, on the left in a warrior's garb, wears the imperial crown of the Holy Roman German Empire. Between the two are the Holy Scriptures instead of the usual dove of the Holy Ghost.

The battle scene underneath, as told in Genesis 14: 14-16, shows Abraham in the centre with a golden helmet and breastplate striking down one of the kings and followers of Chodorlahomor who were holding Abraham's nephew, Lot, captive. A downcast, bearded Lot can be seen on the right of the scene with his hands tied and the inscription "lod" upon his helmet. Abraham's followers fight the other three kings and their armies. The continuation of the previous tale can be seen in the background: Abraham (portrayed

as the first horseman in the battle beneath the word "abraha[m]" in gold) being blessed by a tonsured Melchizedek (identified by the inscription "melchisedech"), the high priest and king of Salem with a loaf in his right hand and a container of wine in his left. The army in the background, amongst which four figures on horseback can be distinguished, shown emerging from a fortified city probably represents the four kings who captured Lot as he left Sodom.

The reference to the need to resort to military force to safeguard the purity and solidity of the Christian faith is probably most noteworthy aspect of this miniature, undoubtedly intended to irrefutably justify the conquest of Granada in 1492. The historical significance of this is enormous, not only because of what it represented after eight centuries of Islamic occupation of the Iberian Peninsula but also in a Christian Europe afraid of the proximity of the powerful Islam.





COATS OF ARMS OF THE CATHOLIC MONARCHS AND THEIR CHILDREN AND CHILDREN-IN-LAW, f. 436v.

This impressive miniature features the coat of arms of the Catholic Monarchs upon a mauve ground. The imposing eagle of St John, the tetramorph eagle of the Apocalypse, is present not only because Isabella was crowned on this saint's feast day but also because of her great devotion to St John the Evangelist. Whilst still an adolescent, Isabella said she wanted this eagle to be the support for her own coat of arms, as revealed by a drawing of hers dated May 15th 1473 (Madrid, RAH, Co. Salazar y Castro, K-37, f. 112v).

- *Pro patribus tuis nati sunt tibi filii. Constituisti eos principes super omnem terram* (Ps 44, 17)

(In the stead of your parents shall your children be born unto you, and you shall make them the princes of all the earth)

- *Potens in terra erit semen eius: generatio rectorum benedicetur* (Ps III, 2)

(Powerful is the lineage of this seed on the earth: blessed be the generation of the righteous)

Both quotations are particularly eloquent taking into account the Breviary's enormous political significance. By marrying the children of Maximilian of Austria and Marie of Burgundy – at a time when America had just been discovered – these two children of the Catholic Monarchs did indeed become virtually “princes of all the earth”. In particular, this image of the coat of arms is a splendid tribute to the culmination of an extremely important political strategy achieved thanks to that double marriage.

The counterquartered coats of arms underneath are those of the two pairs of spouses. The arms of the children of the Spanish monarchs are the same as those of their parents, and those of the Hapsburg dynasty are quartered with inescutcheon.

y Yo la Princesa



The fact that she called her only son John and her second daughter Joanna (the female version of John in Spanish) is also due to this devotion. In this miniature, the eagle's head is flanked by two phylacteries inscribed with the words *sub umbra alarum tuarum protege nos* (in the shadow of your wings protect us). Undulating beneath the coat of arms are another three phylacteries with quotations from two psalms:



Aure.	mae?	1812	Adrius h't dies xxxi. luna xxv.
xi.	b	May.	Philippi et iacobi aplos
	c	vi. no.	Rathemine ysis senensis tot.
xix.	d	v. no.	Innocencio sce anas.
viii.	e	iiii. no.	Corone donum. Theodoli m. mte
	f	iii. no.	
xvi.	g	scie. no.	Johannis ante portā latinā
v.	a	honis.	Translatio beati petri milis. to.
	b	viii. id.	Appartio sū nychaclis. to.
xiii.	c	vii. id.	
ii.	d	vi. id.	Ordiani et epinachi. mart. . m. lē.
	e	v. id.	
x.	f	iiii. id.	Aceti et achillei et pancracii m. l.
	g	iii. id.	Semati epi et confess.
xviii.	a	scie. id.	
vii.	b	idibus.	
	c	xvi. kl.	Junij.
xv.	d	xv. kl.	
iiii.	e	xv. kl.	Solm geninus
	f	xiiii. kl.	Potentiane uigins. memona.
xii.	g	xiii. kl.	
i.	a	xii. kl.	
	b	xi. kl.	
xix.	c	x. kl.	Translatio bti dmi. totij dux.
viii.	d	ix. kl.	Orbani pape et mart. m. lē. Estas oit
	e	viii. kl.	
xvi.	f	vii. kl.	
v.	g	vi. kl.	
xiii.	a	v. kl.	
ii.	b	iiii. kl.	
	c	iii. kl.	Cancas. canciam. canciamille.
x.	d	scie. kl.	Petromille uigins. memona.



Auguſt	Auguſtus h' dices xij. luna xxx	
nuſt	14or h' loras x. Dies xco. xiiij.	
viii. c	Auguſti	Ad vincula ſa p'ni. ix. leones.
xviij. d	am no	Stephani pape m'ius. iij. lc.
v. d	an no.	Inuentione ſaſtephi p' thomi ſimplex.
xij. f	ſeſie no	
xix. g	nomis.	ſi omnia p'us n'li. totu dup.
vi. h	id?	Transfiguratione d'ni. totu dup.
xiii. i	vi. id?	Donati epi. maria felix. zaga. meoia.
x. c	vij. id?	Linati z ſatoru ei' m'ia. memoria.
xviii. d	v. id?	vigilia.
xvi. e	iiii. id?	Laurencij m'is. meoia.
ix. f	iii. id?	Tiburcij m'is. ſimplex.
xvi. g	ſeſie id?	Act. ſa z omnia. ſimplex.
xiii. h	idibus.	ypoliti m' cum ſocis ſuis. ſimplex.
vi. i	xix. kl.	Septembus. Eusebij. ſi meo. vig.
xiii. c	xviii. kl.	Assumptio marie. totu d.
x. d	xvii. kl.	
xviii. e	xvi. kl.	Act ſancti laurencij. ſimplex.
xvi. f	xv. kl.	Agapiti m'ia. meo. Soli iungue.
ix. g	xiiii. kl.	
xvi. h	xiii. kl.	Bernardi abbatis. ſimplex.
xiii. i	xii. kl.	
x. c	xi. kl.	Act ſce marie. ſimp. Thimothei z ſi.
xviii. d	x. kl.	Vigilia.
xvi. e	ix. kl.	Saitholomiei apoſtoli.
ix. f	viii. kl.	Incomia confelloris. ſimplex.
xvi. g	vii. kl.	
xiii. h	vi. kl.	Rufi m'it'is. memoria.
x. i	v. kl.	Auguſtini epi tot. d. Sabine.
xviii. c	iiii. kl.	Decollatio ſa iohis bap.
xvi. d	iii. kl.	felices z audacti m'ia. memoria.
ix. e	ſeſie. kl.	

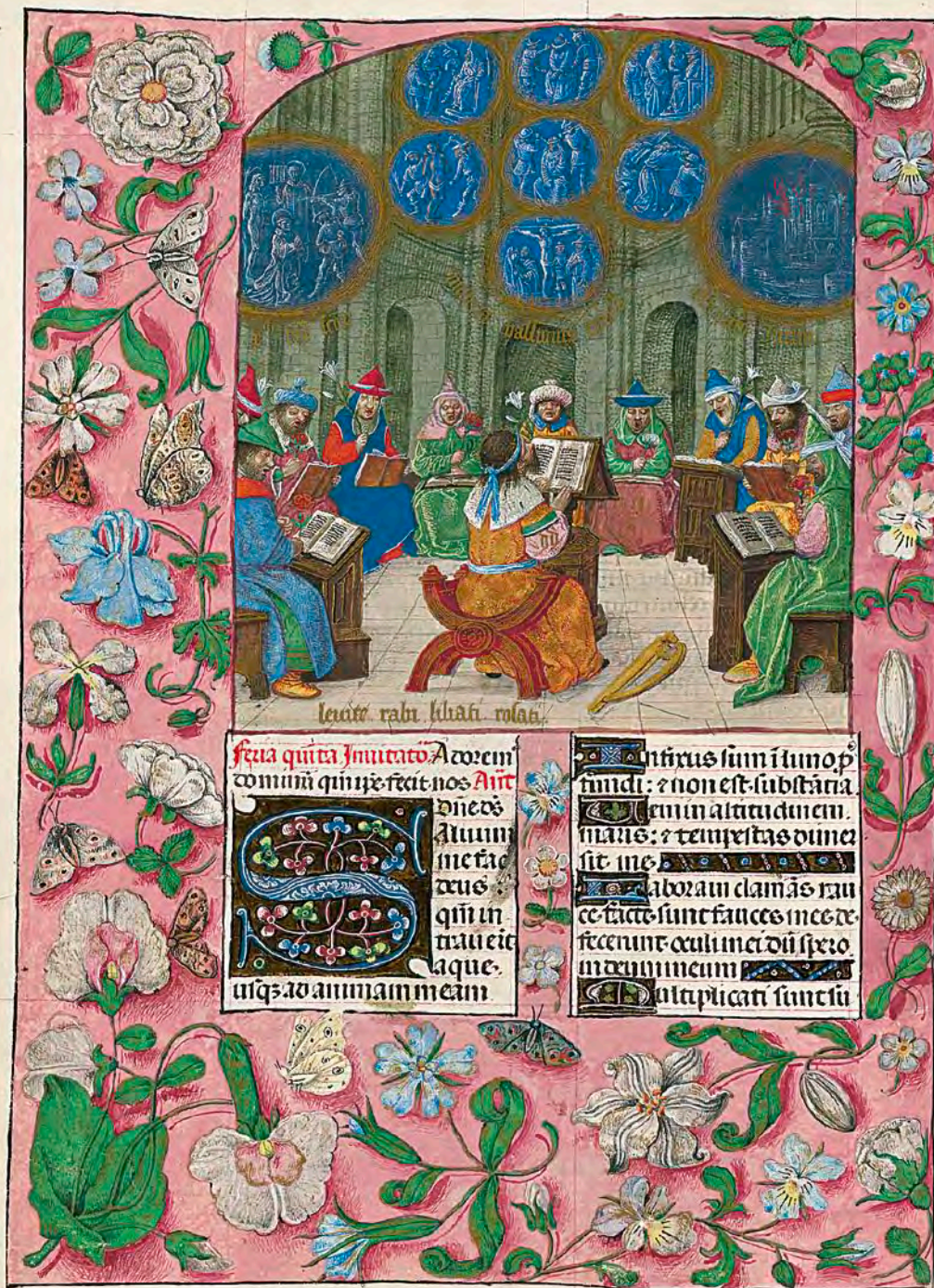




f. 111v, Nebuchadnezzar presides over the burning of books.



f. 252r, The parable of Dives and Lazarus.



f. 146v, David and the Temple singers.



f. 354r, Annunciation and the tree of Jesse.

Beate iacobe omni
um corde
re ore laudas
et opatio
ne singulares et amabili
intercede pro nobis ad
dominum. **Ad mag. An.**
Solus et cunctis hispania
sumus iacobe qui inter a
postolos primatus tence
rimus cum martiri
o lauriantis. o singulare

Esto dominus ple-
bi tue sanctifi-
cator: et custos
ut apostoli miracobi
munera percipias et con-
uersione tibi placeat
et secunda demerita per do-
mini **admonitione** de se-
cundo **fofo** et in ciuitate
martyrii oio

Resta quis
omnipotens
deus: ut qui
gloriosus in
his christorum et cucu
fatem fortis in sua con
fessione cognouimus.
pro apud te in nostra in
fessione sentiamus
domini *Ex gestis eius* *100*

Iacobus p^{ma}
apostolus eni
p^odicasset per
indeam et sum
riam: predicationem
suam usq; ad galatiam
extendit. tibi non e dis

Cum angelista quinquage

Ecce liam tuam
domine benig-
nis illustra ut
beati iohannis apostoli
cum euangelista illum
nata ex matris ad dona p-
ueniat sempiterna Per
Memoria de hunc in la



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Stamping the ribs



Palmet and title



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Lugo, 23 de marzo 2010.

Lugo, March 23rd, 2010.



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