

The Bot and the Psalter

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Abstract: In late April 2025, I ran a number of experiments to test how well ChatGPT o4-mini-high would perform when asked to interpret page images of the Genoa Polyglot Psalter of 1516. As one would expect, the results were mixed. On the one hand, ChatGPT correctly identified the book, gave numerous correct details about it, and was often able to accurately read and characterize the texts. On the other hand, it gave some answers that any human, even one unfamiliar with the alphabets, could see are wrong; some that a human who knows the alphabets but not the languages could see are wrong; and some that a human who knows the languages could see are wrong. It can also give inconsistent answers in consecutive sentences without noticing the inconsistency.

The Genoa Polyglot Psalter of 1516¹

Agostino Giustiniani (1470-1530) was born into a noble and wealthy family in Genoa. Like many of his contemporaries, he had a passion for classical languages – not just Latin and Greek, but also Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic – and like some others, he had a deep interest in the learning of the Jews. His scholarship earned him an appointment as the first professor of Hebrew and Arabic at the University of Paris. He also became Bishop of Nebbio in Corsica.

In 1516 Giustiniani published, at his own expense, the *Psalterium Hebraeum, Graecum, Arabicum, et Chaldaicum, cum tribus latinis interpretationibus* – the book of Psalms in Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, and Chaldean (Aramaic) with three Latin interpretations. Two thousand printed copies were produced by the Genoese publisher Petrus Paulus Porro; plus fifty deluxe copies printed on vellum for presentation to royalty. He had originally

¹ The information in this section is from [the Wikipedia article on Agostino Giustiniani](#) and from [the web page for the Psalter](#) in the Digital Exhibits of the Special Collection of the Library of University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee.

planned to continue the entire Bible in this style; however, the sales of his book disappointed him; though he had prepared a polyglot text of the New Testament, he did not publish it.

The Genoa Psalter consists of seven versions of the text of the book of Psalms in parallel columns plus a *scholia* – a Latin commentary written by Giustiniani starting in the rightmost column and continuing on the bottom of the page. The columns, left to right are:

- The original (Masoretic) Hebrew text, pointed with vowels and cantillation marks.
- A literal translation of the Hebrew, by Giustiniani.
- The standard Vulgate translation by Jerome (c. 390 CE)
- The Septuagint – the classic Greek translation (c. 250 BCE)
- An Arabic translation. I don't know the provenance of this. It may well be Giustiniani's own translation.
- The Aramaic translation "Targum on Psalms", pointed with vowels and with cantillation marks. Little is known about the date of this² and nothing at all about its authorship. The translation is somewhat loose.
- A literal translation of the Targum into Latin, presumably by Giustiniani.
- The beginning of the scholia, continued at the bottom of the page across the width of both pages.

The Psalter is also noteworthy, historically, because Giustiniani included in his comment on Psalm 19:5 – "Their voice carries throughout the earth; their words to the end of the world" – a short account of Christopher Columbus' life and voyage, one of the earliest such accounts published. Giustiniani felt that Columbus' voyages had fulfilled the prophecy of the verse. Columbus' son Ferdinand, who was a litigious guy, considered the account inaccurate and prevailed on the Genoa Senate to decree that the book should be destroyed. However, the decree was not much enforced, and many copies survive.

It has been claimed in various places that the Genoa Psalter was the first polyglot psalter, the first Arabic printed using movable type, and the first published account of Columbus' second voyage, but I am not certain of any of these. It was certainly among the earliest instance of all of these.

Giustiniani also wrote, among other things, translations of the book of Job and of Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*.

² David Stec (*The Targum of Psalms*, Liturgical Press, 2004) writes ``A very tentative suggestion would be fourth to sixth century CE, but this is little more than guesswork.''

The physical copies of the books and the page images

I first learned of the Psalter a week ago (April 18, 2025), when I dropped by an exhibition³ “(Be)Forewords, Letterforms & Typography” at the NYU Bobst Library. The exhibition includes NYU’s copy of the Psalter, opened to the beginning of Psalm 1. The page includes all six verses of Psalm 1. Below is a photo that I took; on the next page there are details of the tops of the two pages.

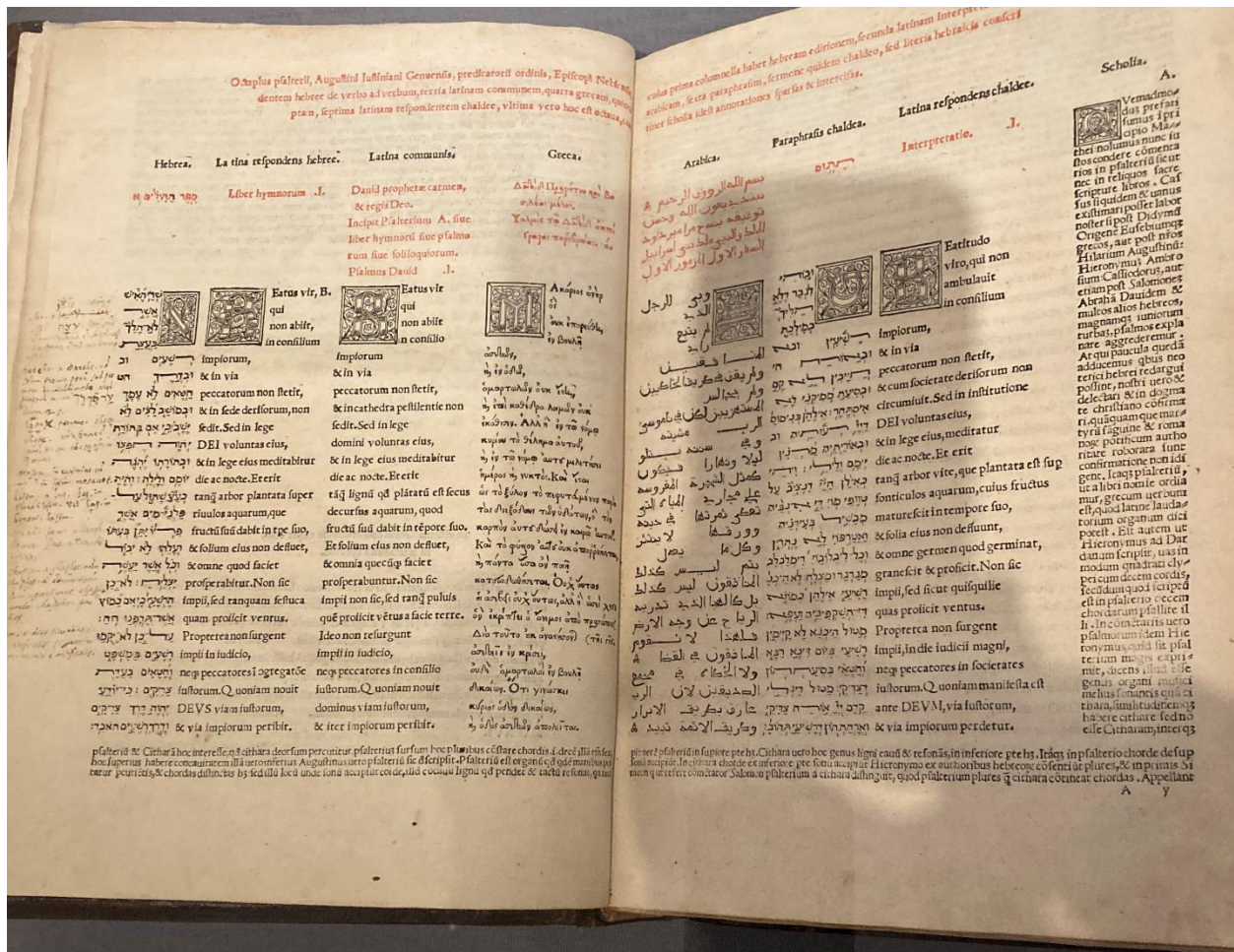


Figure 1: Genoa Psalter, first page. By permission of the NYU Library Special Collection

³ The exhibition was curated by Charlotte Priddle and is ongoing until June 13,

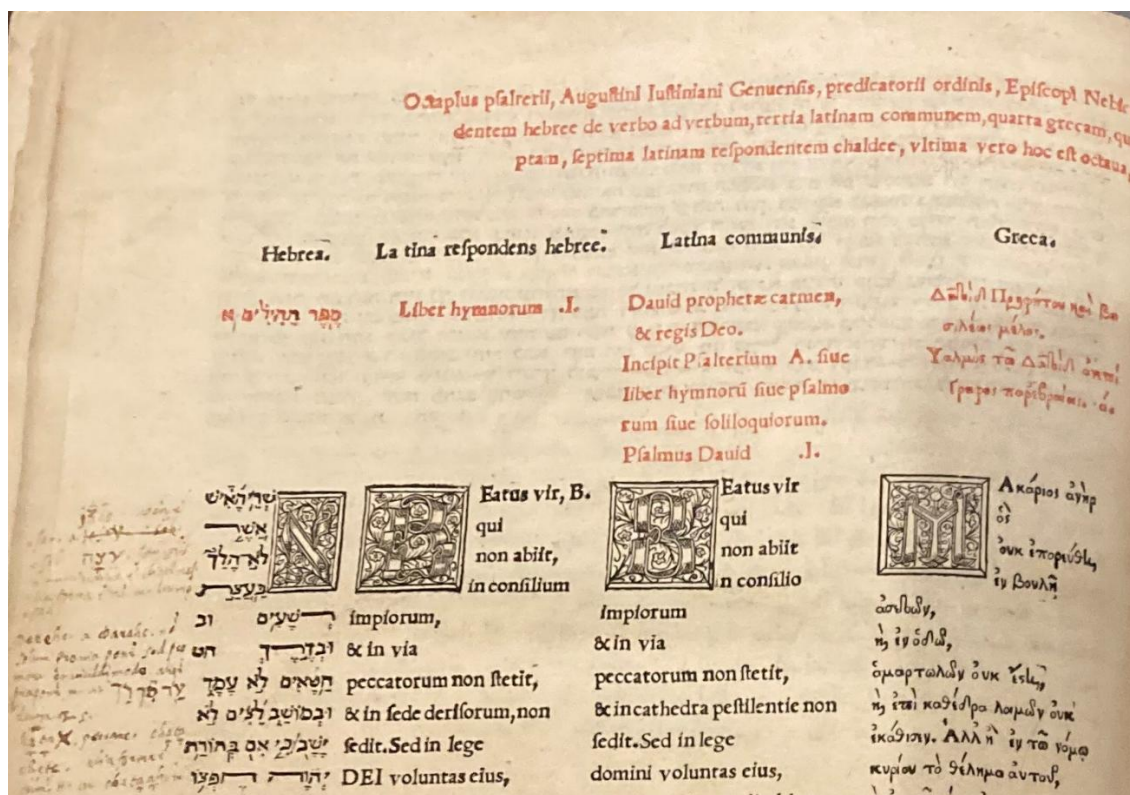


Figure 2: Top of left-hand page: Detail of Figure 1

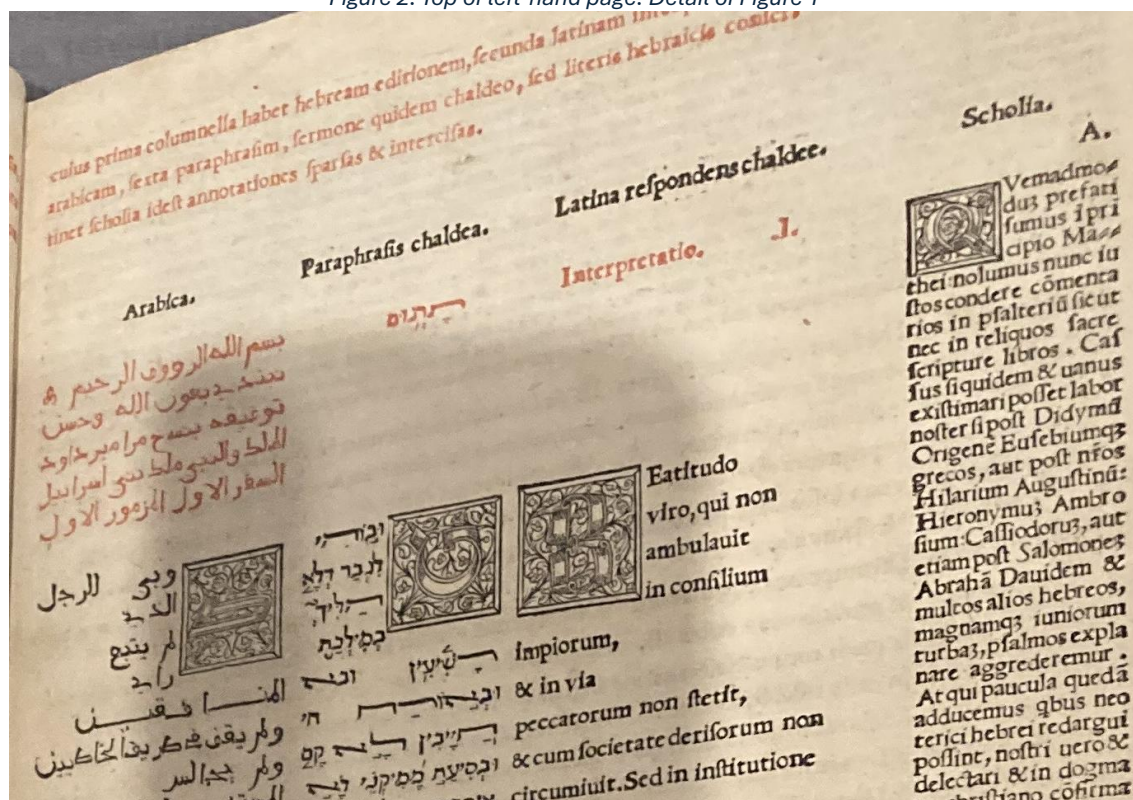


Figure 3: Top of right hand page: Detail figure 1

As you can see, it is a beautiful book, in splendid condition (in 1516, they made books to last). It is a quarto; thus, a page is about 12 inches tall and 8 inches wide. The book is 400 pages long. The shadow in the center and on the right is the shadow of my phone and hand.

In this specific copy, there are handwritten notes in Greek letters (with a few Hebrew words) in the left margin of the left page. I have not been able to find out what these are or who wrote them. I don't read Greek, and in any case this writing is much harder to make out than the print.

In looking for information about the book, I ran across another page image as a [digital exhibit at the Library of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee](#). This page shows Psalm 19, verses⁴ 7-15, chosen because it includes some of the discussion of Columbus (see detail).

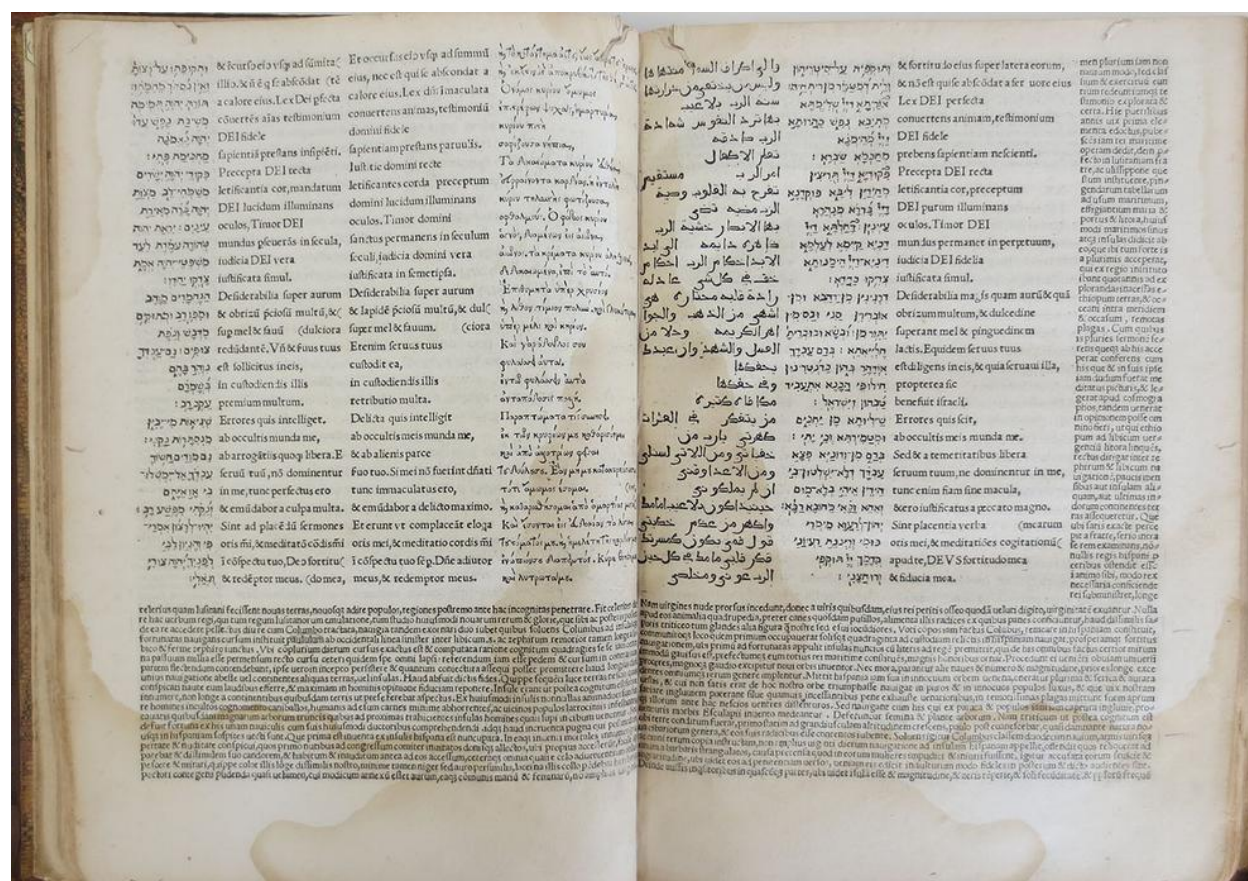


Figure 4: Genoa Polyglot Psalter, open to Psalm 19:7-15. From the Digital Exhibits, University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee Library, Special Collections

⁴ This is the standard numbering in Hebrew Bibles. The numberings of the Psalms and their verses differ between editions.

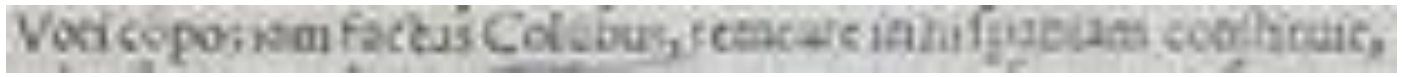


Figure 5: Detail of figure 4, showing reference to Columbus. In figure 4, this is in the bottom text block, right hand page, three lines from the top.

The ChatGPT Experiments: Overview

Following a suggestion by my friend and colleague Haym Hirsh, I input both of these page images to ChatGPT o4-mini-high to see what it could do with them. In my first experiment, I input the image of Psalm 19 from the Wisconsin copy, asked “What is this?”, and continued with some follow-up questions. In the second experiment, I accidentally input the image of Psalm 1 in the NYU copy using an image that included the exhibition label that identified the book. I began the session with the image and the question “Can you say what this is?”. I asked one follow-up question, but I ended that session when I realized my mistake. In the third experiment, I input the same image of the NYU copy, with the label cropped out. I began the session with the image and the question, “Can you identify this?”, and then asked follow-up questions about details in the image.

Full transcripts of the experiments are in the appendix.

As usual with these kinds of experiments, the results were mixed. On the plus side, all three experiments ChatGPT identified the image as a sixteenth-century polyglot Psalter; in experiments 2 and 3, it identified the image specifically as the Genoa Psalter. In all three experiments it correctly identified the Psalm that is displayed. It answered many of the questions posed correctly and provided much additional correct information. In experiment 1, it reads the Latin from the literal translation and from the scholia (these texts do not seem to be available online) and, impressively, correctly expands out the many abbreviations.

On the minus side, it gave some answers that any human, even one unfamiliar with the alphabets, could see are wrong; some that a human who knows the alphabets but not the languages could see are wrong; and some that a human who knows the languages could see are wrong. It can also give inconsistent answers in consecutive sentences without noticing the inconsistency. In particular, in experiment 1 it stated that there were four columns of text and in experiment 2 it stated that there were five columns. In experiment 3 it correctly identified the eight columns of text, but failed to notice the handwritten column of notes, and made a wild guess when I asked about that specifically. Also in experiment 3,

when I asked it to read the first verse in some of the Latin versions, it got some of those wrong. When I asked it about the stylized letters in the boxes at the top of the columns, it correctly stated that these were the initial letters, but misidentified some of them, despite knowing how the text actually begins. To a considerable extent, ChatGPT seemed to be answering questions about the text based on its preconceptions, which were not always correct, rather than looking at the image.

As usual with large language models, there is a stark, hard-to-explain gap between its remarkable abilities when it succeeds and its equally remarkable deficiencies when it fails.

What does it matter?

No one would claim that reading 16th century texts is the killer app for large language models. What can be learned from all this that is actually relevant? Why did I bother doing the experiments and writing them up?

First, in view of the unlimited hype surrounding AI in general and large language models in particular, this kind of experiment has some value in keeping the discussion grounded in reality. The much discussed [AI-2027 scenario](#), for example, predicts in passing that by the end of 2025 (eight months from now!), there will be AIs that have “a PhD-level knowledge of every field”. I often get the sense that many of the people who make those kinds of predictions have no idea what constitutes expert-level knowledge or expert-level capacities in any field except, possibly, computer science. With these kinds of statements being tossed around casually, it is salutary to remind people that AIs facing problems from various fields make some mistakes that even human beings who are entirely ignorant of the field could avoid, and make many mistakes that a human (such as myself) with only casual knowledge could avoid.

The flip side of this is that the publication of benchmarks like “Humanity’s Last Exam” tend to give people the impression that really hard problems that involve very obscure knowledge like figure 6 below are all that differentiates human experts from current AI systems. Again, it is worth emphasizing the degree to which current AI systems often flounder even on quite simple problems in niche domains.

Question:

I am providing the standardized Biblical Hebrew source text from the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (Psalms 104:7). Your task is to distinguish between closed and open syllables. Please identify and list all closed syllables (ending in a consonant sound) based on the latest research on the Tiberian pronunciation tradition of Biblical Hebrew by scholars such as Geoffrey Khan, Aaron D. Hornkohl, Kim Phillips, and Benjamin Suchard. Medieval sources, such as the Karaite transcription manuscripts, have enabled modern researchers to better understand specific aspects of Biblical Hebrew pronunciation in the Tiberian tradition, including the qualities and functions of the shewa and which letters were pronounced as consonants at the ends of syllables.

מִן־נָעֲרָתֶךָ יוֹסִין מִן־קוֹל רָעֵמָה יִסְפְּדוּ (Psalms 104:7) ?

Figure 6: From (Phan et al., 2025) "[Humanity's Last Exam](#)" arXiv preprint 2501.14249

Second, many of the mistakes that ChatGPT made in my experiment are characteristic of its failings in general. Its grasp of spatial relations is extremely weak. It falls back on default knowledge rather than engaging with the specific case before it. It generates obviously inconsistent answers and is unable to recognize the inconsistency even when the answers are brought immediately together. It hallucinates and then insists on sticking to its hallucinations. The Genoa Psalter and other similar documents can serve as a method, somewhat off the beaten track, of tracking the progress of AI technology in these regards.

Final thought

Let me finish with an observation and a question that only time can answer. The Genoa Polyglot Psalter is five hundred years old. When it was printed, the Columbus voyages, which seemed to Giustiniani worthy of Biblical prophecy, were recent; Columbus had returned from his fourth voyage twelve years earlier, and had set sail on his first voyage twenty-four years earlier. Gutenberg's movable type was sixty-one years old. The Vulgate was 1100 years old; the Septuagint was 1700 years old; the Psalms were between 2000 and 2400 years old.

Five hundred years have passed, and the world has changed almost beyond recognition in many respects. Nonetheless, Giustiniani's book is still treasured in libraries where people

can go see it, and its constitutive elements have retained their place in the world to a remarkable degree. The repercussions of Columbus' voyages and of Gutenberg's printing press are ubiquitous. The Psalms are still recited. The Vulgate and the Septuagint, Jerome and King David, and even Giustiniani are still remembered.

My question is, how will all this appear five hundred years from now? Will our descendants twenty generations hence consider the development of artificial intelligence and of large language models in the 2010s and 2020s to have been as epochal as the printing press and the European invasion of the Americas? Will they remember Sam Altman and OpenAI and ChatGPT o4-mini-high? Will there still be copies of the Genoa Psalter in libraries? Will they still remember Giustiniani? Will there still be people who recite the Psalms? My money is on the Psalms.

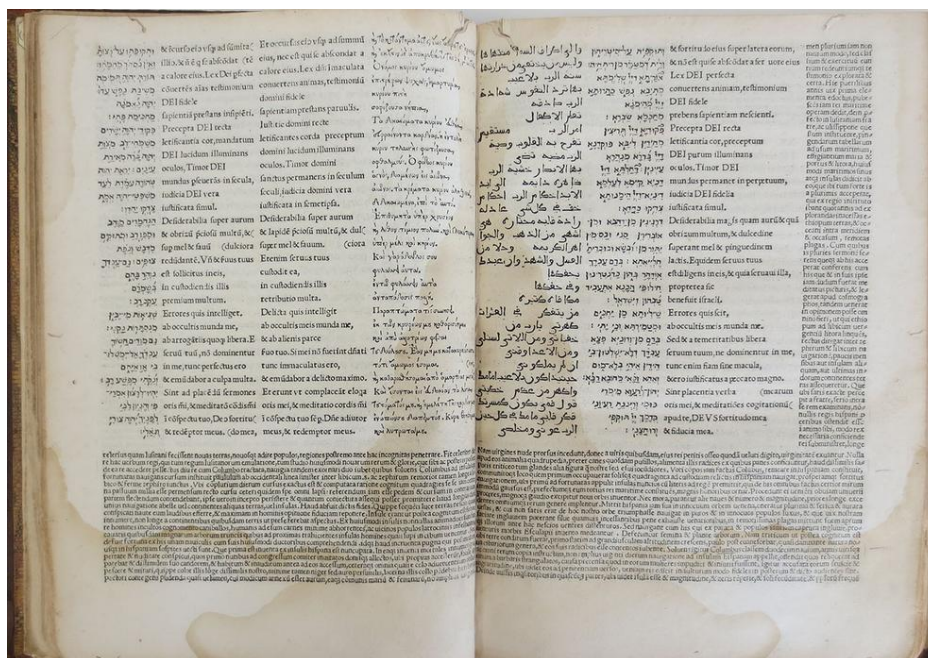
Acknowledgement

Thanks to Haym Hirsh for suggesting the experiment; to Michael Harris, for information about the Arabic; and to my brother Joey for helpful feedback and for catching many errors of ChatGPT that I had missed.

Appendix: Transcripts of the experiments

These experiments were carried out April 21-25, 2025 on ChatGPT o4-mini-high. In the transcripts below, comments in italics are editorial and were added later; they were not part of the dialogue.

Experiment 1: Psalm 19:7-15



User: What is this:

ChatGPT:

This isn't a modern facsimile or an art-book at all but a leaf from a 16th-century polyglot Psalter—that is, the Book of Psalms printed in several ancient versions side by side. In the upper registers you can see, left to right, the Hebrew Masoretic text, the Latin Vulgate, the Greek Septuagint, and an Arabic translation, with a continuous Latin scholarly apparatus running across the foot of both pages. It comes from one of the great Renaissance polyglot Bibles (for example, the Plantin “Biblia Regia” of Antwerp, 1568–1573, or its earlier Complutensian prototype at Alcalá), whose editors set out to present Scripture in all its classical languages in parallel columns.

Comment: ChatGPT correctly identified this as a 16-century polyglot Psalter. (The claim that it is not a modern facsimile is presumably a lucky guess; by definition a photo of a facsimile looks the same as the original.) It correctly identifies four of the columns of text

but it missed the Aramaic and the two alternative Latin translations and the fact that the scholia begins in the rightmost column. The claim in the first sentence that it comes from a Psalter is inconsistent with the claim in the third sentence that it comes from a Bible.

User: Can you identify the specific text in the image?

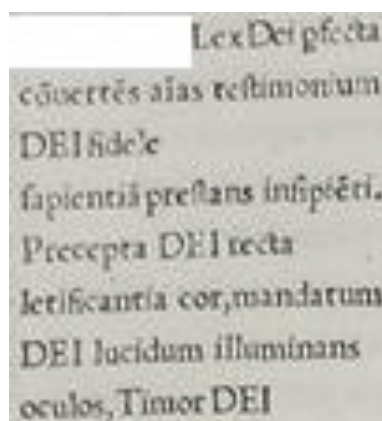
ChatGPT: This isn't random text at all but a four-language parallel of the famous "law of the Lord" passage from the Psalms—namely Psalm 19:7–10 (Hebrew numbering; in the Vulgate this is Psalm 18:8–11). In the Latin you can read, for example:

"Lex Dēi perfecta, convertens animas; testimōnium Dēi fidēlissimum, docēns parvulōs. Justitiā Dēi rectā, lætificantes cor; mandātum Dēi lucidum, luminans oculōs."

Here it sits in four columns—Hebrew (Masoretic), Latin (Vulgate), Greek (Septuagint), and an Arabic translation—with the scholastic commentary below.

Comment: ChatGPT correctly identified the Psalm and the starting verse displayed, though it misses the fact that the text displayed continues to the end of the Psalm (verse 15). Its comment about the numbering in the Hebrew vs. the Vulgate is correct. In producing the Latin it has, impressively, read the Latin from the literal translation of the Hebrew (second column) and correctly expanded out the many abbreviations in the printed version. For instance, the word "animas" is abbreviated as "aias" in the page image. (This text does not seem to be available online, so it is unlikely that ChatGPT is quoting it from memory.) Here, for comparison, is the printed version of the text that it is quoting:

It makes some errors in the reading: it quotes "fidelissimum docens parvulos" whereas the original reads "fidele sapientia prestans insipieri."



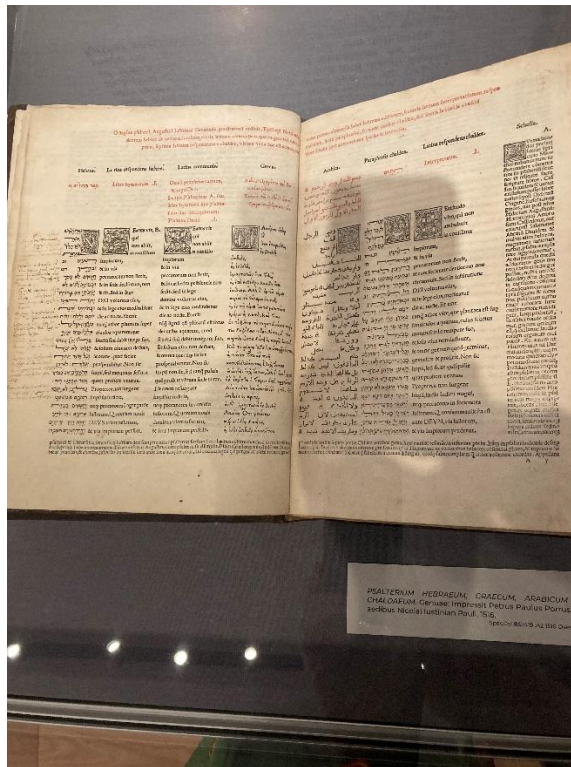
ChatGPT again states that there are four columns, missing the Aramaic column, and the fact that there are three columns of Latin translation and one of Latin scholia..

User: In the third line of commentary at the bottom, on the left-hand page, the words "Columbo" and "Columbus" appear. What are they doing there?

ChatGPT: Those aren't stray printer's errors at all but the Latinized name of Christopher Columbus, showing up in two different grammatical cases in the footnote. In that third line the commentator is illustrating "the voice of their thunder going out to the ends of the earth" (Ps 19 [18]:4) by referring to Columbus's trans-Atlantic voyages. Thus you see Columbo (the dative/ablative: "with Columbus") and Columbus (the nominative) as part of the scholarly Latin apparatus citing his expedition as a modern parallel.

Comment: This answer by ChatGPT is entirely correct. In a rather odd verbal tic, all three of ChatGPT's answers in this experiment begin "[This isn't/These aren't] ... at all , but ..."

Experiment 2: Psalm 1



User: Can you say what this is:

ChatGPT:

This is a leaf from a very early polyglot Psalter—the Psalterium Hebraicum, Graecum, Arabicum & Chaldaeum — printed at Genoa in 1516 by Petrus Paulus Porrus (in the press of Nicolaus Justinianus Pauli). It lays out Psalm I in five columns (Hebrew, the Aramaic “Chaldaic” paraphrase, the Latin Vulgate and the Latin literal, plus Greek and Arabic), one of the landmark editions in Renaissance biblical scholarship.

Comment: ChatGPT has correctly identified the specific book; however, since I carelessly included the Library exhibition label with that information, that’s not hugely impressive. It reports only five of the eight columns, and omits the scholia at the bottom.

User: What is the text displayed?

ChatGPT:

The page you’re looking at is the very beginning of Psalm I (“The Blessed Man”) from the Psalterium Hebraicum, Graecum, Arabicum & Chaldaeum (Genoa, 1516). In five parallel columns you can read:

Hebrew:

אַשְׁרֵי הָאִישׁ

Chaldean (Targum):

אַשְׁרֵין-אַנְשִׁין

Latin Vulgate/Literal:

Beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum...

Greek (Septuagint):

Μακάριος ἄνθρωπος ὃς οὐκ ἐπορεύθη...

Arabic:

طوبى للذي لم يسلك في مشورة الأشرار

All five give the opening line of Psalm I (“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked...”), each in its original or classical translation.

Comment: ChatGPT correctly identifies the text displayed. The Hebrew, Latin, and Greek are quoted correctly. The Aramaic is a more-or-less correct translation of the beginning of the verse, but it is not the translation printed in the text, which starts טובִיָּה דְגַבְרָא

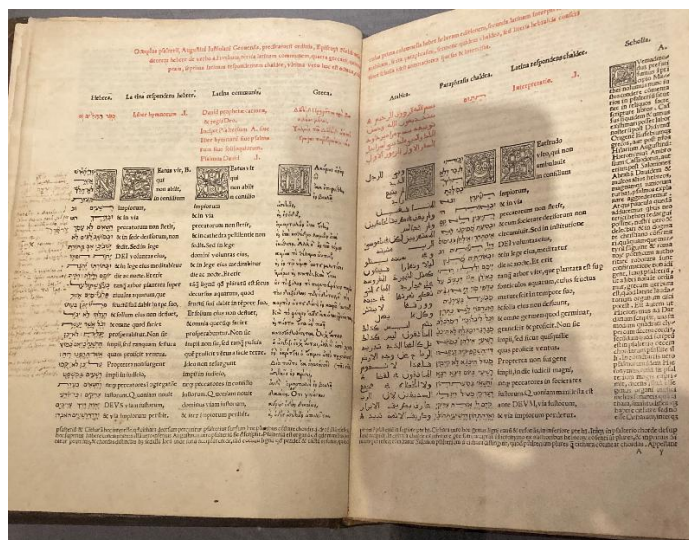
The Arabic is also a correct translation of the verse, but it is not the same translation as is printed in the text. It corresponds to the translation given on [this web page](#).

ChatGPT repeats the mistaken claim that there are five columns of text.

At this point I realized that I had included the exhibition label identifying the book, so I ended the session.

Experiment 3: Psalm 1, without the exhibition label.

Comment: I started a new session of ChatGPT. As far as I know, ChatGPT by default does not carry context or information from one session to the next, so it carried out this conversation without knowledge of the exhibition label. However, I am not sure of that.



User: Can you identify this?

ChatGPT:

This is the famous Genoa “Quadruplex” (or Octaplum) Psalter, formally titled Psalterium Hebraeum, Graecum, Arabicum, et Chaldaicum, edited and financed by Bishop Agostino Giustiniani of Genoa and printed there in 1516. It was the very first polyglot Psalter ever published, laying out the Psalms in eight parallel columns (Hebrew, literal Latin of the Hebrew, the Vulgate, the Septuagint Greek, Arabic, the Chaldean/Aramaic Targum, a Latin translation of that Targum, plus scholia)

Comment: The identification of the book and associated information is correct. This time, ChatGPT correctly reports the eight columns of text. However, it misses the column of handwritten annotations in the leftmost column of the left page. The columns other than the scholia are identified in the red Latin print at the top of each column.

User: Can you identify the columns of text in the image, left to right?

ChatGPT: Reading the running headers across the top of the two-page spread, the eight parallel columns are, in order from left to right:

Hebræa

(the original Hebrew text of the Psalms)

Latina respondens Hebræe

(a very literal Latin rendering of the Hebrew)

Latina communis

(the “common” Latin, i.e. the Vulgate Psalter)

Greca

(the Septuagint Greek version)

Arabica

(an Arabic translation of the Psalms)

Paraphrasis Chaldaea

(the Aramaic “Chaldee” Targum paraphrase)

Latina respondens Chaldæo (Interpretatio)

(Latin translation of that Chaldee paraphrase)

Scholia

(Latin scholia or commentary on the text)

Comment: This is correct, though ChatGPT has changed the spelling of a few words from the text.

User: What is the text at the bottom of the page?

ChatGPT: That fine-print running under both pages is not more Psalms at all but Giustiniani’s little “Appellatio” or instrument-note, in which he explains the Hebrew words psalterium and cithara and how they differ. It begins on the left:

Psalterium et Cithara hoc inter se distinguuntur: psalterium plurium chordis, cithara paucioribus...

and goes on to say that the psalterium takes its strings in the upper part, the cithara in the lower (citing Hieronymus and “Solomon the commentator”), and that the psalterium has many chords while the cithara only a few. It closes at the right with the sigla “Appellant A Y.”

Comment: ChatGPT gets the first four words right here but then goes off the rails. The actual text begins “psalteria et Cithera hoc interesse quod cithara deorsum percutitur”. (It is altogether unlikely that this text exists in digital form online, so the fact that ChatGPT gets the first word right indicates clearly that it is reading the text from the image.) Moreover, ChatGPT did not realize that it started its reading in the middle of a sentence that actually starts at the end of the scholia in the rightmost column. ChatGPT’s comment about “the sigla Appellant A Y” was again not quite right. “A Y” is some kind of printer’s mark, but “Appellant” is part of the text of the scholia; it is the first word of a sentence that will be continued on the next page. ChatGPT fails to point out that “Hieronymus” and “Solomon the commentator” are now more usually known as “Jerome” and “Rashi”. ChatGPT’s odd “...not ... at all, but...” verbal tic that we noted in experiment 1 has reappeared.

User: What is the leftmost column on the left page?

ChatGPT: The leftmost column on the left-hand page is the original Hebræa—i.e. the Hebrew text of the Psalms.

User: No, there's a column to the left of the Hebrew. What is that?

ChatGPT: That skinny strip of tiny Hebrew on the far left isn’t a translation at all but the Masoretic glosses—the marginal “Masora Parva,” containing the little notes on spelling, word-counts, variant readings, etc., that the medieval Masoretes appended to the biblical text.

Comment: ChatGPT did not notice the column of annotations handwritten in Greek to the left of the Hebrew. When I insisted, it made a wild guess. “Masora Parva”, as ChatGPT describes them, are indeed sometimes printed next to a printing of Hebrew scripture, but that is not what we have here.

User: What is the rightmost column?

ChatGPT: The very slim column on the far right is the Scholia—the Latin marginal commentary (drawn from Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Didymus, the medieval exegetes, etc.) that Giustiniani prints alongside the text.

Comment: Correct.

User: What are the ornate decorations in the square boxes at the top of each column?

ChatGPT: Those little square panels are decorative “initials” (in this case wood-cut initials) marking the start of Psalm 1 in each language or version. In other words, they’re the ornate capital letters (the Hebrew ב, the Latin B of “Beatus,” the Greek Μ of “Μακάριος,” the

Arabic ب, the Aramaic character, the Latin again for the Targum's rendering, and finally the "A" of the scholia) that serve as drop-caps to head each column.

Comment: This is largely correct but not entirely. The first letter of the Hebrew text is א (aleph), and the first letter of the scholia is "Q". ChatGPT's answer does not state what is the first letter in the Aramaic and the Latin Targum columns. It misidentified the initial letter of the Arabic; ChatGPT says it is a "baa" whereas in fact it is a "haa".

User: What did you say was the first letter of the Hebrew?

ChatGPT: I said it was the Hebrew letter ב (bet).

Comment: ChatGPT repeats its error.

User: How does the Hebrew text of Psalm 1 read?

ChatGPT: Here is the full Hebrew text of Psalm 1 (verses 1–6), as it appears in the Masoretic (Hebrew) text:

אֲשֶׁר־יֵאָמֵר לֹא־הָלַךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבִמְנוּשָׁב לָצִים לֹא יֵשֵׁב:
כִּי אִם־בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חֻפָּצוֹ וּבְתוֹרַתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וּלְיָלִיָּה:
וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שֶׁתוֹלַע עַל־פְּלִגֵּי־מִים אֲשֶׁר פָּרְיוֹ יֵתֵן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעָלְהוּ לֹא־יָבֹל וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ:
לֹא־כֵן הָרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם־כְּסָלֶת כְּמֶזֶץ אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְפְּנֶהוּ הָרוּחַ:
עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט וְחַטָּאִים בַּעֲדַת־צַדִּיקִים:
כִּי־יִוָּדַע יְהוָה דֶּרֶךְ צַדִּיקִים וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים תִּבְדָּל:

Comment: ChatGPT's quotation of the Hebrew psalm was almost but not quite correct; in the fourth verse it inserts the meaningless word 'כְּסָל' . ChatGPT does not notice the contradiction with its previous answer about the first letter.

User: What is the first letter?

ChatGPT: The very first letter of the Hebrew text of Psalm 1 is א (aleph).

Comment: ChatGPT still does not notice the contradiction.

User: What is the Aramaic character in the decorative initial? You forgot to say,

ChatGPT: The little panel over the Targum (the Paraphrasis Chaldaea) is likewise a drop-cap: it's the Aramaic beth (ב), the first letter of the Aramaic word "ברִיךְ" ("barīk," "Blessed..."), which heads the Targumic rendering of Psalm 1.

Comment: This is wrong. The first word of the Aramaic is טוביה, so the first letter is tet.

User: Can you read the first verse of the Targum?

ChatGPT: Here is Psalm 1:1 in the Aramaic Targum (Paraphrasis Chaldaea) as found in the Giustiniani Psalter:

Aramaic (Targum)

טוביה דגבר דלא הלך במלכת רשעים ובאורחת חייבין לא קם ובסיעת ממקני לא אסתחר:

Transliteration

Tûvêh digbar dēlā halîkh bēmilkat rašî‘in ūbə’orḥat ḥayyābîn lā qām ūbəšî‘at mēmīqnē lā əstəḥar.

Literal English Rendering

“Happy is the man whose conversation has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the paths of sinners, nor sat in the seat of mockers.”

Comment: ChatGPT’s quotation of the Aramaic is correct. The transliteration has a few errors: “digbar” should be “digvar” and “əstəḥar” should be “istəḥar” The literal English translation is nearly correct except that “conversation” does not belong there; it should be “Happy is the man who has not walked ...”

User: Can you read the first sentence of the rightmost Latin column?

ChatGPT: The very first sentence of the Scholia (right-most column), headed by the ornamental “Q,” reads:

Quoniam nolumus nunc istos condere commentarios in Psalterio, sive ut nec in reliquos sacrae scripturae libros.

Literally: “Since (quoniam) we do not wish now to compile full commentaries on the Psalter, nor indeed on the other books of Holy Scripture.”

Comment: This is all correct, but ChatGPT does not notice the contradiction with its earlier statement that the ornamental letter was “A”.

User: Can you read the Latin translation of the Targum?

ChatGPT: The Latin “Interpretatio” of the Targum (the 7th column) begins, with the drop-cap B, as follows:

Beatus vir, qui non ambulauit in consilium impiorum,
 et in via peccatorum non stetit,
 nec in cathedra derisorum sedit.

Literally:

“Blessed is the man who did not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stand in the way of sinners,
 nor sit in the seat of mockers.”

Comment: This has several errors. The correct reading is “Beatitudo viro, qui non ambulauit in Consilium impiorum & in via peccatorum non stetit & cum societate derisorum non circumiuit. (See image after the next interchange.) A better literal translation of the second line would be “and who did not stand” rather than “nor stand”.

User: Is there a difference between the first verse in the Latin translation and in the Vulgate?

ChatGPT: Yes. If you set them side by side, you see only small but telling shifts in vocabulary and conjunctions:

Clause	Vulgate (common Latin)	Latin of the Targum-Interpretatio
1st verb	qui non abiit in consilio impiorum	qui non ambulauit in consilium impiorum
2nd clause	et in via peccatorum non stetit	et in via peccatorum non stetit
3rd clause	et in cathedra pestilentiae non sedit	nec in cathedra derisorum sedit

- **abiit** (“went”) vs. **ambulauit** (“walked”) in the first clause
- **et ... et ... et** in the Vulgate vs. **et ... nec** in the Targum-Latin
- **cathedra pestilentiae** (“seat of pestilence/scourge”) vs. **cathedra derisorum** (“seat of mockers”)

Otherwise the sense is the same: “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of ...”

Comment: As can be seen below, ChatGPT repeats its misreading of the Targum translation, It misses the difference in the first two words: “Beatus vir” in the Vulgate vs. “Beatitudo viro” in the Targum translation. It misses a small difference in the parts of the verse that is quoted: “consilio” vs. “consillum” in the first line. In the second to last line, it quotes the Vulgate as “et ... et ...et” whereas the Vulgate has only two “et”s.

Vulgate

Eatus vir
qui
non abiit
in consilio
Impiorum
& in via
peccatorum non stetit,
& in cathedra pestilentie non
sedit. Sed in lege

Latin translation of Targum

Eatitudo
viro, qui non
ambulauit
in consilium
impiorum,
& in via
peccatorum non stetit,
& cum societate derisorum non
circumiuir. Sed in institutione
lucaseius,