

# The Jewish Book

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# The Jewish Book

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CONTENTS

ADAM SHEAR

The Jewish Book: Views & Questions

4

LAWRENCE H. SCHIFFMAN

The Dead Sea Scrolls & The History of the Jewish Book

12

YAACOB DWECK

What Is a Jewish Book?

24

JEFFREY SHANDLER

The Jewish Book & Beyond in Modern Times

36

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# The Jewish Book: Views and Questions

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In the last several decades, the study of reading, writing, and publishing has emerged as a lively field of inquiry in the humanities and social sciences. Historians and literary scholars have engaged with a number of questions about the impact of changes in technology on reading practices and particularly on the relationship between new technologies of reading and writing and social, religious, and political change. The new field of the “history of the book,” merging aspects of social and intellectual history with the tools of analytical and descriptive bibliography, came to the fore in the second half of the twentieth century at the same time that the emergence of new forms of electronic media raised many questions for social scientists about the ways that technological change have affected aspects of human communication in our time. Meanwhile, while the field of book history emerged initially among early modernists interested in the impact of printing technology, the issues raised regarding authorship, publication, relations between orality and the written word, dissemination, and reception have enriched the study of earlier periods.<sup>1</sup>

The coming of the Internet and electronic books has increased the saliency and frequency of such discussions. Recent years have seen increasing discussion about fundamental changes in the nature of the “book” and of reading practices. Our sense that we may be living through a revolution in reading practices, driven by technological change, has led to scholarly and popular interest in the history of the book. While studies of previous episodes of changes in reading and writing practices help us to illuminate our own situation, the experience of living through changes in technology helps historians rethink the past as well.

Issues of textual transmission and bibliography have been fundamental to modern Jewish studies since the nineteenth century, but until recently these studies have generally been seen as philological tools toward “establishing the text” or bibliographical tools for locating texts to serve as evidence in historical or literary study. However, as the general field of the

history of the book and reading has taken off in recent decades, the study of the history of Jewish books (or “material texts” more broadly) has attracted increasing attention from scholars in various disciplines across Jewish studies.

In the last decade, we have seen increasing institutional efforts within the framework of academic Jewish studies. For a number of years, the Center for Religion and Media at New York University has sponsored a working group on Jews and media.<sup>2</sup> Since 2003, the Jewish Studies program at the University of Pennsylvania has sponsored a series of annual “master class” workshops on Jewish book history;<sup>3</sup> and in 2005–2006, the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies devoted a year of study to the topic;<sup>4</sup> a new journal on the Jewish book, *Quntres*, has been founded recently under the auspices of the Jewish Theological Seminary; the venerable *Alei Sefer* has been revived at Bar-Ilan University;<sup>5</sup> and conferences and panels on the topic have multiplied in recent years.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these institutional efforts to advance the field and the recent growth of publications especially on the impact of print in early modern Jewish culture,<sup>7</sup> many questions remain about the role of books and reading in Jewish history and about the effects of technological change on Jewish culture. During the academic year 2009–2010, the Center for Jewish History in New York gathered a small number of scholars, at various career stages, working on different periods in Jewish history and representing a range of methodologies and disciplines, to convene a Working Group on the History of the Jewish Book. The first task was to consider the “state of the field”—or even more fundamentally, the definition of the “field”—in order to lay out an agenda of questions and topics for discussion. To that end, we invited Lawrence Schiffman, Yaacob Dweck, and Jeffrey Shandler to present brief remarks at the opening meeting of the group in October 2009. The essays that follow represent only slightly edited versions of those talks.<sup>8</sup>

Taken together, the three essays suggest a rough outline of issues for consideration of the “Jewish book” across different periods and historical contexts. Looking at three distinct periods in Jewish history—the late Second Temple period (Schiffman), the early modern age (Dweck), and

the modern and contemporary period (Shandler)—all three essays focus on questions of authorship, publication, dissemination, and readership.<sup>9</sup> While none of the authors here invokes this model or adheres strictly to it, Robert Darnton’s concept of the “communications circuit” remains a useful heuristic or framing device for understanding the travels of a text in material form from author to reader.<sup>10</sup> With attention to storage and collection, our authors also consider the transmission of material texts over time, addressing a central concern of those who noted the relatively synchronic nature of Darnton’s model.<sup>11</sup> And all three essays respond to Dweck’s suggestion that the history of the book not only tells us something about the use of material texts but also serves as an avenue toward discussion of broader historiographical concerns. The new model of book history does not rigidly mark separations between bibliography, philology, and literary analysis. An understanding of the dynamics of print in the production of the *Shulḥan ’arukh* tells us something about the intellectual and religious history of early modern Jews; we understand the content of the Dead Sea Scrolls better for understanding the scribal practices that created them; and we can appreciate the significance of the emergence of new forms of Jewish literary activity in the modern world more clearly by appreciating both the medium and the message.

Conversely, we can clearly see some of the challenges for scholars who want to make use of book history in their methodological toolkit. Both Shandler and Dweck emphasize the transformative nature of new technologies in making information more widely accessible and with new forms of “content” found in the new media.<sup>12</sup> Of course, in both the early modern and the contemporary cases, we must also try to distinguish between the results of technology and the results of other factors (demographic, political, social, or intellectual). In many cases, the two cannot be easily separated.

In the case of the writers and users of the Dead Sea Scrolls, technological change is not a major issue, although the conceptualization of the proper kind of technology for writing (encompassing questions of writing surface, ink, and format) are of concern to some in the Second Temple period and in the rabbinic literature that emerged later. It would be a mistake, however,

to assume that change in the technology of publication only matters from Gutenberg forward. While the medieval handwritten book is not addressed in this forum, a scholarly consensus has emerged that the transition from scroll to codex had a transformative impact in late antiquity in the West.<sup>13</sup> The full impact of this transition on Jewish culture has not been comprehensively studied, although we do know a great deal about the codicological aspects of medieval Hebrew manuscript books, thanks to the work of Malachi Beit-Arié, Collette Sirat, and others.<sup>14</sup>

Schiffman's survey of the different attitudes toward orality and writing by different Jewish groups in late antiquity reminds us that a full picture of Jewish literary culture in any period must attend not only to the reality of scribal practices and/or practices of oral transmission but also to the ideological framing of what a text—specifically, an authoritative text—is. As Schiffman points out, by the beginning of the medieval period, the rabbinic emphasis on “oral Torah” was primarily an ideological framework rather than an accurate description of the material form of canonical literature.<sup>15</sup> The “textualization of rabbinic culture” (as Talya Fishman puts it) in the Middle Ages certainly needs further study.<sup>16</sup> Despite a lack of major technological changes in the material forms of Jewish books from approximately the eighth century to the fifteenth, the medievalist is well positioned to consider the processes of writing, publication, dissemination, and reception that Schiffman notes in antiquity and that Dweck and Shandler note in modernity.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, a word about the rubric *Jewish book*. All three essays either implicitly or explicitly raise the question of what a “Jewish” book is. Is it a book with a Jewish author? An intended Jewish reader? A book written in Hebrew or in a vernacular in Hebrew script? Or is it a book with “Jewish content”? Can the same text (e.g., the Bible) be “Jewish” in some contexts and not in others? Certainly we can dismiss some such questions as semantic quibbling, and get on with the practical business of historical and literary scholarship. However, a careful consideration of the dynamics of such definitions and interactions in different historical contexts points out some of the ways that book history can illuminate larger historiographical questions. If we reframe the question from “what is a Jewish book” to what can

we learn about perceptions and views of given historical actors in their categorization of particular material texts, we open up a more nuanced historical analysis, attuned more carefully to the complex dynamic interplay of text and context in any given time and place. We hope that the three essays here offer food for thought and useful suggestions for agenda-setting for this complex and dynamic field of scholarly inquiry.

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## NOTES

- 1 On the development of book history, see Leslie Howsam, *Old Books and New Histories: An Orientation to Studies in Book and Print Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).
- 2 This group sponsors a Web site (Modiya Project, <http://modiya.nyu.edu/>) that contains details of their work over the years.
- 3 Jewish Studies Program at the University of Pennsylvania, The Manfred R. Lehman Memorial Master Workshop in the History of the Jewish Book, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jwst/lehmann.htm>.
- 4 For a list of members of that group and their topics of research, see <http://www.cjs.upenn.edu/program/2005-2006/list.html>.
- 5 *Quntres* is available at <https://taljournal.jtsa.edu/index.php/quntres/index>. *Alei Sefer* is available through Bar-Ilan University Press at [http://www.biupress.co.il/website\\_en/index.asp?category=62](http://www.biupress.co.il/website_en/index.asp?category=62).
- 6 For example, the organizers of the Early Modern Workshop, an annual project dedicated to translation and discussion of primary sources for early modern Jewish history, devoted the 2009 workshop to the issue of Jewish reading practices. See “Reading across Cultures: The Jewish Book and Its Readers in the Early Modern Period,” <http://www.earlymodern.org/workshops/2009/>.
- 7 Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Print and Jewish Cultural Development,” in *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, ed. P. Grendler et al. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1999), 3: 344–46; Zeev Gries, *The Book in the Jewish World, 1700–1900* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007); and most recently David B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), chap. 3, “Knowledge Explosion.” For additional references on more specific areas, see the works cited by Dweck in his essay.
- 8 I am grateful to Elisheva Carlebach for her support of the Working Group and for her invitation to submit these essays to *AJS Review*.
- 9 For reasons of time, we were not able to invite contributions from scholars working on the rabbinic period or the medieval period. See below for some comment on the study of the Jewish book during the period in which manuscript codices were the primary means of disseminating texts.
- 10 Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” *Daedalus* 111 (Summer 1982): 65–83.
- 11 See Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker, “A New Model for the Study of the Book,” in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, ed. N. Barker (London: The British Library, 1993), 5–43.
- 12 My use of the term *content* here is self-consciously a reminder that our conceptualization of past periods is shaped by our own time. I doubt very much that I would have characterized the nature of the texts in an early modern printed book using the rubric of *content* before the invention of the Internet.
- 13 For a recent study of the importance of the codex in the emergence and spread of Christianity, see Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
- 14 To my knowledge, no comprehensive survey of the impact of the scroll-codex transition on Jewish culture exists. For a survey of the existing studies on the early Hebrew codex, see Stefan C. Reif, “The Impact on Jewish Studies of a Century of Genizah Research,” in *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Judit Tagarona Borrás and Angel Sáenz Badillos (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 1: 603 n. 102; and David Stern, “The First Jewish Books and the Early History of Jewish Reading,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98 (2008): 163–202, esp. pp. 195–99. For introductions to the work on medieval Hebrew manuscripts, see Malachi Beit-Arié’s *Hebrew Manuscripts of East and West: Towards a Comparative Codicology* (London: The British Library, 1993); and Colette Sirat, *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages*, trans. N. de Lange (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 15 For an example of a later rhetorical emphasis on oral transmission in the midst of a written culture, see Elliot Wolfson, “Beyond the Spoken Word: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Medieval Jewish Mysticism,” in *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion*, ed. Yaakov Elman and Israel Gershoni (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 166–204.
- 16 See Talya Fishman, “Rhineland Pietist Approaches to Prayer and the Textualization of Rabbinic Culture in Medieval Northern Europe,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 11 (2004): 313–31.
- 17 For an argument that the basic paradigms of the “history of the book” so often focused on print should be extended to the study of the Middle Ages, see Jessica Brantley, “The Prehistory of the Book,” *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (2009): 632–39. Armando Petrucci has partly paved the way; see his *Public Lettering: Script, Power, and Culture*, trans. L. Lappin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).



# The Dead Sea Scrolls and the History of the Jewish Book

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The complicated process whereby the biblical books took shape and were copied and transmitted in biblical times can only be partly reconstructed based on biblical evidence, with the help of ancient Near Eastern parallels. Clearly, the biblical era constitutes the first stage in the history of the Jewish book, or more correctly, the Jewish book *par excellence*. However, for the period immediately following, the Second Temple period, the level of documentation for creating, editing/redacting, and copying and disseminating Jewish books is now enormous due to the discovery, publication, and analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>1</sup> While this information relates directly to the period in which the Scrolls were copied, from the last part of the third century BCE through the early first century CE, it also allows us a model with which to supplement our understanding of the biblical period, and much of it is directly relevant to the rabbinic period in which most of the same scribal conventions were in use.

There is one fundamental difference, however, in this regard between the Scrolls and the rabbinic evidence. The sect that gathered the Scrolls and the authors of the nonbiblical materials, both apocryphal-pseudepigraphal (i.e., Bible-related) or sectarian (peculiar to the Qumran sect), stem from a writing-oriented culture, in which the ongoing development of the Jewish tradition was a literary activity. The history of rabbinic literature begins with the Pharisees who revered the books we call biblical, but whose extra-biblical traditions were developed and transmitted orally. While some scholars argue that oral traditions played a role in the development of biblical literature,<sup>2</sup> Second Temple Jews all dealt with biblical books as finished products, albeit not yet completely stabilized as to text or authoritative status.<sup>3</sup> The Pharisees pursued a written-oral culture in which orality characterized their own traditions. Later rabbinic convention initially continued this orality, and developed the full-blown Oral Law concept. Eventually the oral became written and orality became primarily an identifier of the theoretical origins of the “oral” Torah in God’s revelation at Sinai.<sup>4</sup> None of this

was of concern to the Dead Sea sectarians who did not accept the Pharisaic “traditions of the Fathers.”<sup>5</sup> For the Qumran sect, all Jewish law and tradition was derived from the interpretation of the written text of the Bible conducted by the sectarians,<sup>6</sup> and no unwritten traditions were acceptable, except in matters of the organization of the sectarian community.<sup>7</sup>

We will deal below with the following steps in text production as can be gleaned from the Scrolls: composition, editing/redacting, copying, circulation, and gathering and storage.

#### COMPOSITION

The Scrolls give us information about the composition of only one type of literature, collections of laws called *serakhim*.<sup>8</sup> These laws were derived from Scripture by halakhic midrash and then organized into *serakhim*, lists of laws on a topic, and were often provided with titles such as “Regarding Forbidden Consanguineous Marriages.”<sup>9</sup> Such topical collections are in some ways forerunners of the later orally redacted mishnaic tractates or their earlier oral proto-tractates. We know that the collectors of larger halakhic compositions found at Qumran had such *serakhim* available. Similarly composed “mini-rules,” stemming from the sectarian assembly (*moshav ha-rabbim*),<sup>10</sup> seem to underlie the collections of sectarian rules included in the various rule scrolls.

#### REDACTION

Quite a number of Dead Sea Scrolls texts show evidence of redaction that enable us to learn about this process. Specifically, since all the major sectarian compositions survive in more than one recension, in which different components are variously assembled, it becomes clear that the larger texts were assembled from sources that originally circulated as independent units. This is certainly true about the Damascus Document (Zadokite Fragments),<sup>11</sup> Rule of the Community,<sup>12</sup> War Scroll,<sup>13</sup> the Berakhot texts,<sup>14</sup> and Hodayat<sup>15</sup>—among the most significant sectarian scrolls. It is also the case with the Temple Scroll, the sources of which are easily recognized.<sup>16</sup> But comparison with the expanded Pentateuch scrolls shows that some raw material got into both redactions.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the best example is the

penal code that appears in various versions in three different texts.<sup>18</sup> In the area of biblical text, several texts are clearly preserved in more than one literary edition.<sup>19</sup> The Scrolls preserve both proto-Masoretic and proto-Septuagintal editions of Samuel, but Chronicles is based on another edition, different from the canonical Samuel. The Scrolls preserve in Hebrew both proto-Masoretic Jeremiah and proto-Septuagintal. In the case of Psalms, we can see that the order was not yet standard in different editions. In the view of some scholars, an expanded version circulated as well, with texts not part of our canonical Psalms. Here we are not discussing the issues of lower biblical criticism occasioned by the existence of various text types and minor textual variations.

#### COPYING

The amount of data about the scribal practices, preparing hides, ruling, writing, ink and writing materials, attaching pieces, and rolling of scrolls is enormous.<sup>20</sup> We can only survey a small portion of this data here. However, it seems that much of it is relevant to the way scrolls were written in biblical times, and it is certainly the case that the procedures required in tannaitic *halakhah* are in accord with many practices followed by the Qumran sectarians.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, the biblical scrolls from Qumran that are closest to the proto-Masoretic text type tend to accord most closely with later rabbinic scribal rules. However, as codices developed and Torah scrolls became symbols with a ritual role to play, more and more specifications reflecting holiness and guaranteeing aesthetic concerns became associated with them in the rabbinic corpus.

Qumran scrolls are written mostly on skins of bovines, sheep, or goats, and a small number on papyrus, a material not permitted by later rabbinic law for biblical scrolls. The ink is a carbon-based vegetable product, with no metallic content. It is normally black, with just a few words written in red, a practice not permitted by the rabbis for biblical scrolls. The script is generally the square script, known also as Assyrian or Jewish script, although a small number of texts are written in the paleo-Hebrew script or have divine names in that script, practices again forbidden by later tannaitic authorities. As required by tannaitic sources, the writing surface is

ruled by incising vertical lines to provide intercolumnar margins and also with horizontal lines for suspending the letters. The various methods of correcting manuscripts used in the scrolls are mostly permitted in rabbinic sources, but some are not.<sup>22</sup>

There has been much discussion about methods employed for copying scrolls in terms of whether they are copied from other manuscripts or orally through listening. For Torah scrolls, rabbinic law requires direct, visual copying. Actually, the Scrolls bear witness to errors of both graphic and phonetic form,<sup>23</sup> but it appears that copies were generally made from other written copies.<sup>24</sup>

#### CIRCULATION

It is clear that some texts were widely circulated. This is the only sensible way to understand how some apocryphal-pseudepigraphal books are found in various translations, while Hebrew and Aramaic originals are found at Qumran. Further, the Qumran collection contains multiple copies of various books, both biblical and nonbiblical, written often in different writing systems and clearly of disparate origin. Biblical manuscripts have been found at Qumran, Masada, and in the Bar Kokhba Caves dating over a few centuries. These chance examples of preservation probably indicate that biblical manuscripts were widely spread in the Land of Israel. Further, the presence of some of these same apocryphal and pseudepigraphal works at Qumran and Masada also indicates that these works were part of the literature of the wider Jewish community and constitute exactly the types of works prohibited by the tannaim as *Sefarim ḥizzoniyim*, “external books,” that is, books outside the list of authoritative books.<sup>25</sup>

#### GATHERING AND STORAGE

It became clear with the study of the entire collection that the scrolls found at Qumran in the eleven caves were of disparate origin geographically and in their literary traditions.<sup>26</sup> Only the sectarian Scrolls (about one-third of the total) even related to the particular views of the Dead Sea sect.<sup>27</sup> Further, even if the contents are mostly uniform, the collection of Greek texts in Cave 7<sup>28</sup> indicates that even within the sect there were differences

in holdings in the various caves.<sup>29</sup> Overall, the practice of gathering biblical and other books into a collection can be seen here.

We are accustomed to referring to the Qumran collection as a library. Some have tried to argue with this concept.<sup>30</sup> However, since the origins are disparate, as testified to also by the fact that only a few scribes appear more than once, the library theory is most likely. Further, we have evidence of the wearing out and repair of books, correction over a period of years, and the use of multiple copies that confirm the notion that this collection was made by the group that occupied the buildings at Qumran. This is especially true of the collection of Scrolls found in Cave 4 that in antiquity had shelves on which the manuscripts were stored, probably sideways. Further, the common conception that the Scrolls were stored in jars needs to be corrected. Most Qumran Scrolls were not stored in jars. Some, however, were wrapped in linen cloths. In general, Scrolls were tied closed with leather thongs that attached to the back of the scroll at its start with little squares of leather. Others were tied with strings.<sup>31</sup> While numerous jars were found with the Scrolls, no Scroll was ever found in a jar by an archaeologist. However, some written material was attached to a jar brought for sale by the Bedouin. From the excessive height of the “Scroll jars,” it is obvious that they were manufactured for food storage and only used secondarily, if at all, for Scrolls.<sup>32</sup>

Thus far, we have been talking about a library of real books, but we need to remember that in some Second Temple texts, there also exists a “library” of pseudo-books or imaginary works. Here we refer to books that are totally imagined, functioning to convey ancient, often antediluvian traditions to the forefathers of Israel. Often this motif is employed to argue for the authenticity of pseudepigraphal works that claim to divulge the teachings of patriarchs and other biblical figures who are said to have received knowledge from these ancient books.<sup>33</sup> From the point of view of this study, the imagining of such books shows the extent to which written texts are assumed to be the authoritative conveyance of Jewish teachings.

## STANDARDIZATION OF THE TEXT

Finally, the Scrolls give us much information related to the difficult questions of the standardization and canonization of the Jewish Book, the Bible. Several issues are involved here—including the stabilization of the text and the determination of the contents of the canon. However, it is precisely in these issues that there is great disagreement among scholars.

Regarding the formation of the canon, there are two positions. One holds that there was no concept yet of a specific authoritative list—what we call a canon.<sup>34</sup> The other view, which I hold, argues that Qumran texts show evidence of a concept of the tripartite canon—Torah, Prophets, and Writings—but that the Writings were not yet a closed and totally defined corpus. In my view, the canon of all Jews in the Land of Israel followed this same development.<sup>35</sup>

In the Scrolls we can also follow the fixing of the text of the individual books. The Scrolls bear witness to the existence of a variety of text types in Second Temple times, and a complex process by which eventually the Masoretic consonantal text, give or take some textual variants, became the norm. When we move from the variety of text types found at Qumran to the more or less Masoretic collection at Masada, to the revision of Greek Bibles, toward the Masoretic Text (MT) in the Bar Kokhba Caves, we can see how the MT emerged dominant in the first two centuries of our era.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, the final decisions about the canon were made, and the Pharisaic-rabbinic supporters of proto-MT became the dominant influence on the future development of Judaism.

## CONCLUSION

The history of the Jewish book in antiquity has been radically transformed by the evidence of a collection of actual physical books. This evidence promises to help us to better understand the formation of the written texts that underlie the development of Judaism and those that shaped the debates and disputes of Second Temple times. Further, these manuscripts help us to understand the composition, transmission, and collection of both biblical and nonbiblical texts in antiquity from a technical point of view. Much more importantly, they open up a window to the realistic background

against which there developed the unique combination of written and oral culture, of the scribal and the oral, that has characterized Judaism throughout the ages. Scholarship about the written part of this cultural transmission has been totally reshaped by the Dead Sea Scrolls.

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## NOTES

- 1 See the exhaustive study of Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert*. Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 54 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004).
- 2 Cf. Robert C. Culley, "Oral Tradition and Biblical Studies," *Oral Tradition* 1 (1986): 30–65.
- 3 Emanuel Tov, "Hebrew Biblical Manuscripts from the Judaean Desert: Their Contribution to Textual Criticism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 39 (1988): 5–37; Eugene Ulrich, "The Canonical Process, Textual Criticism, and Latter Stages in the Composition of the Bible," in "Sha'arei Talmon": Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon, ed. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 267–91; Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 161–80.
- 4 Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Texts and Traditions: A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1998), 517–20.
- 6 Lawrence H. Schiffman, *The Halakhah at Qumran*. Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 16 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 75–76.
- 7 Sarianna Metso, "Constitutional Rules at Qumran," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, ed. James C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998–1999), 1.186–210.
- 8 Schiffman, *Halakhah at Qumran*, 60–68.
- 9 Lawrence H. Schiffman, "Legal Texts and Codification in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Discussing Cultural Influences: Text, Context, and Non-text in Rabbinic Judaism*, ed. Rivka Ulmer (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 1–39.
- 10 Schiffman, *Halakhah at Qumran*, 68–72.
- 11 Charlotte Hempel, *The Laws of the Damascus Document: Sources, Tradition and Redaction*. Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 29 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998).
- 12 Sarianna Metso, *The Textual Development of the Qumran Community Rule*. Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 21 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997).
- 13 Philip R. Davies, 1QM, *the War Scroll from Qumran: Its Structure and History*. *Biblica et Orientalia* 32 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977).
- 14 Bilhah Nitzan, "The Benedictions from Qumran for the Annual Covenantal Ceremony," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls, Fifty Years after Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20–25, 1997*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, and James C. VanderKam (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society in cooperation with the Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum, 2000), 263–71.
- 15 Eileen M. Schuller, "The Cave 4 Hodayot Manuscripts: A Preliminary Description," in *Qumranstudien: Vorträge und Beiträge der Teilnehmer des Qumranseminars auf dem internationalen Treffen der Society of Biblical Literature, Münster, 25.–26. Juli 1993*, ed. Heinz-Joseph Fabry, Armin Lange, and Hermann Lichtenberger (Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 87–100; Schuller, "The Classification of Hodayot and Hodayot-like (with Particular Attention to 4Q433, 4Q433a and 4Q440)," in *Sapiential, Liturgical and Poetical Texts from Qumran: Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies*, Oslo 1998, *Published in Memory of Maurice Baillet*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 35, ed. Daniel K. Falk, Florentino García Martínez, and Eileen M. Schuller (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 182–93.
- 16 Andrew M. Wilson and Lawrence Wills, "Literary Sources of the Temple Scroll," *Harvard Theological Review* 75 (1982): 275–88; Michael O. Wise, *A Critical Study of the Temple Scroll from Qumran Cave 11* (SAOC 49; Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1990; Lawrence H. Schiffman, "The Deuteronomic Paraphrase of the Temple Scroll," *Revue de Qumran* 15 (1992): 543–68.
- 17 This is also the case, for example, with certain laws found in the Damascus Document and Miscellaneous Rules.
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- 23 *Ibid.*, 18–19.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 25 Schiffman, *Reclaiming*, 399–403.
- 26 Emanuel Tov, "Hebrew Biblical Manuscripts from the Judaean Desert: Their Contribution to Textual Criticism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 39 (1988): 5–37.
- 27 Devorah Dimant, "The Qumran Manuscripts: Contents and Significance," in *Time to Prepare the Way in the Wilderness: Papers on the Qumran Scrolls by Fellows of the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1989–90*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 16, ed. Devorah Dimant and Lawrence H. Schiffman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 23–58.
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- 34 Eugene Ulrich, “The Canonical Process,” 267–91.
- 35 Schiffman, *Reclaiming*, 161–80.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 400, 407.

# What Is a Jewish Book?

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Moritz Steinschneider opened

the greatest monument in the study of Hebrew bibliography, his *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana*, with the following statement:

Our catalog, which we have designated “The Catalog of Hebrew Books in the Bodleian Library” because it is best, contains a concise and detailed overview of the majority of Hebrew books, as well as some that pertain in a way to Jewish literature.<sup>1</sup>

For the next sixty-eight pages, Steinschneider continued to delineate the contours of his work, to list prior bibliographic efforts to catalog Hebrew books, and to explain his methods of organization. If one turns from the introduction to the actual catalog, one can find entries for Elijah Levita’s *Bove buch*, a romance printed in the sixteenth century at an uncertain location; Benedict Spinoza’s *Tractatus theologico politicus*, printed anonymously in 1670; and Menachem Azariah da Fano’s manuscripts from the late sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> And in an entry that seems straight out of Borges, Steinschneider included a listing of his own writings.<sup>3</sup> Neither Levita’s Yiddish romance, nor Spinoza’s Latin philosophical treatise, nor Da Fano’s discussions of Kabbalah in manuscript, nor Steinschneider’s own largely German writings strictly fall under the category of a printed Hebrew book. A fundamental gap exists between the title of the catalog—Hebrew books in the Bodleian Library—and its actual contents, which are works that pertain to Jewish literature. In composing his catalog, one of the greatest bibliographic minds faced a series of overlapping but distinct questions: What is a Hebrew book? What is a Jewish book?

These are variations on a fundamental question that was asked in the late eighteenth century by none other than Immanuel Kant: “What is a book?” Kant asked in the midst of a discussion on piracy in *The Metaphysics of Morals*. He proceeded to answer as follows: “A book is a writing, which represents a discourse that someone delivers to the public by visible linguistic signs.”<sup>4</sup> I

want to examine how Kant's definition applies to one Jewish book from the early modern period—a book many will agree was of some consequence for the history of the Jews—Joseph Karo's *Shulḥan 'arukh*. In doing so, I outline some areas of possible inquiry into the histories of Jewish books between the invention of printing and the onset of political emancipation.

No other book composed in the early modern period had as profound and lasting an impact on Jewish life as Karo's. The *Shulḥan 'arukh* ("The Prepared Table" or "The Ordered Table") eventually became the standard code of Jewish law throughout Europe and the Mediterranean world. With few exceptions, nearly every Jewish community had accepted it as authoritative within generations of its initial publication. The *Shulḥan 'arukh* as a "writing" delivered to the Jewish public by Joseph Karo had a truly transformative impact upon Jewish life. In this way one can speak of Karo's work as a discourse, as an idea. The book served scholars as a reference work and literate lay people as a manual of Jewish law. It stimulated commentary and controversy, resistance and cooptation. One is hard pressed to find another book written in the early modern period that endured as long as the *Shulḥan 'arukh*.<sup>5</sup>

And yet, the *Shulḥan 'arukh* was not a single book. In answering his question, Kant pointed to the dual nature of the book: Not only is a book an idea or a discourse, but it is also "a corporeal artifact, *opus mechanicum*, that can be reproduced."<sup>6</sup> As a material object, or rather as a set of material objects, the early modern editions of the *Shulḥan 'arukh* point to several crucial aspects of its history. The work was composed by Karo in Safed, a center, if not the center, of Jewish culture for much of the sixteenth century.<sup>7</sup> But the *Shulḥan 'arukh* did not take the material form of a printed book in Safed; it first appeared in print in Venice at the Bragadin press in 1564–1565.<sup>8</sup>

The location and date are both of enormous significance, as was the material form the book actually took. Venice was the capital of Hebrew printing for much of the sixteenth century. So much of early modern Jewish culture took material form there: The cultural renaissance in Safed appeared in print at presses in Venice and elsewhere in northern Italy; these same printing houses were meeting places for Jews, converts, Catholics, and Protestants; Hebrew printing in Venice and its environs had a dramatic

impact upon the publication of Yiddish texts; and the Bible and the Talmud became printed books in Venice in the first half of the sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup> It is not an accident that Karo's work, intended to serve as a standard law code for all Jews, appeared there. The date is also of considerable consequence. After the burning of the Talmud in 1553 and a bitter feud between the two most important printers of Hebrew, the production of Hebrew books in Venice had ceased.<sup>10</sup> With its resumption in 1564, a new regime of censorship was imposed upon it, and the Talmud could not appear in print.<sup>11</sup> Karo's *Shulḥan 'arukh* was one of the first texts to appear under this new regime.

The complications posed by the *Shulḥan 'arukh* as a set of material objects do not stop there. The earlier editions were addressed to young men. They were issued in various sizes, some of which could be carried around with ease, and were designed to be used anywhere, not only in the synagogue or in the study hall. Like the editions of the Greek and Latin classics that had appeared at Aldus Manutius' press in Venice earlier in the century, the work contained a preface but offered little commentary.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in some printings Karo's *Shulḥan 'arukh* was not one book, but four, as each volume of Jacob ben Asher's *Tur* to which it served as a *précis* was packaged as its own volume. The early editions hardly looked or felt like the weighty law code it would eventually become.

If one progresses only slightly forward in time, the story of the *Shulḥan 'arukh* becomes even more difficult to sum up as the story of a single book. Between its first printing in 1564 and the end of the sixteenth century, no fewer than seventeen editions appeared in print, the majority of them in Venice, as well as one in Salonika, and six in Kraków.<sup>13</sup> A number of these editions appeared before Karo's death in 1575, and the *Shulḥan 'arukh* was one of the first Hebrew books to be reprinted in the lifetime of its author.

Yet it is safe to say that the *Shulḥan 'arukh* would not have had its staying power as a work of enormous cultural authority had it not become an entirely different text when it appeared in Kraków in 1578–1580 with the glosses of Moses Isserles.<sup>14</sup> Isserles, one of the towering figures of early modern Polish Jewish life, had been at work on his own law code for some time when he learned of Karo's project. Rather than compete, he decided

to append his own glosses with what he claimed were the Ashkenazic customs and practices.<sup>15</sup> In this edition of the *Shulḥan 'arukh*, one finds a central dynamic of early modern Jewish history on the pages of a printed book: the coexistence, competition, and tension between Ashkenazim and Sephardim. Indeed, the very categories of Ashkenazic and Sephardic are thrown into relief by the reactions to Isserles's glosses. Thus Ḥayim ben Bezalel, brother of the famed Maharal, had little patience for Isserles' attempt to summarize all of Ashkenazic tradition in his glosses and took it as a form of cultural imperialism and an erasure of difference among Ashkenazic and Polish practices from different regions.<sup>16</sup>

But Isserles' glosses signaled far more than simply the "Ashkenization" of a Sephardic text;<sup>17</sup> they also heralded the beginning of an extensive commentary tradition that would grow up around Karo's code, radically transforming its purpose and its material form. In the ensuing centuries, Joshua Falk, Shabbateai (or Sabbatai) ha-Kohen, Abraham Gombiner, Israel Meir ha-Kohen, and many others would eventually add their commentaries to all or part of the *Shulḥan 'arukh*. In so doing, they transformed the text from a short compendium accessible to anyone with a basic knowledge of Hebrew into one that required instruction and supervision. The book was also transformed in its material form. Already in the sixteenth century, the *Shulḥan 'arukh* had changed from a being a book that could be carried with ease into a folio volume that required care, attention, and two hands. The commentary tradition that surrounded its text would soon come to dwarf Karo's own work.

This extensive commentary tradition had a further effect of considerable import: By and large, the commentaries to Karo's *Shulḥan 'arukh* that appeared on the printed page were written by Ashkenazic rabbis; the Sephardic commentaries did not usually appear alongside the text. In this intensified Ashkenization of a Sephardic text, one can find a larger trace of one of the central shifts from the early modern to the modern in Jewish history, a shift that has parallels in the transformation of Lurianic Kabbalah by the founders of Hasidism in the eighteenth century and one that is undergirded by a massive demographic transformation of Jewish populations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When Karo wrote

the *Shulḥan 'arukh*, the Jews of the Ottoman Empire were among the largest Jewish communities in the early modern world. When Gombiner wrote his commentary a century later, this demographic profile was beginning to change; and when Israel Meir ha-Kohen composed his in the nineteenth century, the Jews of the Levant were but a small minority of the world's Jewish population.

This brief sketch of the history of the *Shulḥan 'arukh* indicates how complicated the history of one early modern Jewish book can be. A developing subfield within the study of the early modern world, the history of the book as a set of methods has the potential to open up several lines of inquiry into the study of the early modern Jewish past. Below is a rapid survey of a few areas.

#### MANUSCRIPT AND PRINT

In his *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order*, David McKitterick characterizes the relationship between print and manuscript in the early modern period as a long divorce.<sup>18</sup> For Jews, one might posit that the divorce was never finalized: The composition of texts in manuscript never disappeared from Jewish culture. The writing of a Torah scroll, the composition of a mezuzah, and other such sacred objects continues uninterrupted. Even beyond these basic ritual functions, manuscript writing continued to play a crucial role in Jewish societies for centuries after the invention of printing, and manuscripts continue to exist in persistent tension with printed books. One could write an entire work on manuscript culture among early modern Jewry along the lines of Brian Richardson's recent study.<sup>19</sup> Such a book would unearth a range of intellectual activities that have either been studied in isolation from one another or not studied at all. Here too the history of the *Shulḥan 'arukh* proves particularly instructive. In his discussion of the Ashkenazic tradition of glossing the *Shulḥan 'arukh*, Elchanan Reiner concluded: "The Ashkenazi halakhic book at the beginning of the modern era retained certain features inherited from the medieval scribal tradition of knowledge transmission. In certain respects it was a kind of printed manuscript, that is, a text which, in the way it took shape, rejected the new communicative values of print culture and created a text with esoteric

components, thus protecting its elitist position.”<sup>20</sup> Reiner’s concept of a “printed manuscript” neatly dissolves the distinction between print and manuscript so beloved by historians fixated on rupture. It should also serve as the point of departure for the study of several aspects of early modern Jewish culture: the spread of kabbalistic books, the development of Jewish reference works, the study of marginal annotations, and the history of collections to name only a few.

#### EDITING

There has been a flurry of studies on early modern editing. Paolo Trovato and Brian Richardson have explored the range of roles played by editors and bookmen in the formation of Italian literary culture in the Renaissance.<sup>21</sup> Anne Goldgar has examined the editorial entrepreneurs who worked in the Netherlands more than a century later.<sup>22</sup> Scholarship on Jewish editors or the editing of Jewish texts in the early modern period has lagged behind.<sup>23</sup> The very terms for an editor have yet to be studied with any systematic rigor, much less examined in a social context. A study of these known but largely obscure figures might reveal powerful continuities and disruptions between these and later Jewish publicists in the modern period. The editing of the multiple early modern editions of the *Shulḥan ‘arukh* might potentially serve as a case study for how to examine a single text in multiple contexts: editing the same book in Venice, Kraków, and Salonika was a different editorial task.

#### CENSORSHIP

Recent work on early modern censorship by Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin and others has used the methods employed by historians of the book to reframe one of the central sites of interactions between Jews and Catholics in early modern Italy.<sup>24</sup> Their work, and Raz-Krakotzkin’s study in particular, has demonstrated that historians ignore the dynamics of censorship at their peril, that those who have described it as a repressive regime have relied on cultural values similar to the censor—that is, on the definition of Judaism as an autonomous entity, a religion or ethnicity tolerated within a Christian world on the condition that its anti-Christian polemic be suppressed. Yet

there is much that historians still do not know about the history of censorship in the early modern world. Basic bibliographic tools such as a census of all the printed books that contain censor marks by even the most prominent of censors, Domenico Gerosolimitano, have yet to be created. In this instance, the question has at least been posed when it comes to the *Shulḥan ‘arukh*.

#### RECEPTION HISTORY

Historians of the Jews have begun to study the reception of classical and medieval texts in the early modern and modern period. Adam Shear’s recent book on the *Kuzari*, Boaz Huss’s on the *Zohar*, and work on Spinoza by Allan Nadler and Daniel Schwartz have explored three prominent texts or figures and their afterlives.<sup>25</sup> Elchanan Reiner and Joseph Davis have charted the way toward a reception history of the *Shulḥan ‘arukh*; their studies should serve as a model for the unwritten history of Karo’s code among the early modern and modern Sephardic rabbinate. Yet no scholar has taken on the Herculean task of writing a history of the early modern Hebrew Bible along the lines of Debora Shuger’s study of the Bible in the Renaissance or Jonathan Sheehan’s study of the Bible in the Enlightenment.<sup>26</sup> The same can be said of the *Mishnah*, the *Talmud*, and *Midrash*. Or *Sefer Yetzirah*, the *Mishneh Torah*, and the *Guide of the Perplexed*.<sup>27</sup>

#### LIBRARIES

In contrast to the study of the non-Jewish world in early modern Europe, the study of Jewish libraries prior to the modern period has languished until very recently.<sup>28</sup> Yael Okun’s study of Abraham Graziano, a handful of booklists published over the years, Shifra Baruchson’s study of the private libraries of the Jews of Mantua, and Joseph Hacker’s analysis of Sephardic libraries in late medieval Iberia and early modern Salonika constitute some of the more significant contributions.<sup>29</sup> The early modern Jewish equivalents for the term *library*, a word that was thrown into sharp relief with such dazzling results by Roger Chartier some twenty years ago, have yet to be surveyed, much less analyzed.<sup>30</sup> The libraries and book collecting activities of David Oppenheim, Ḥayim Yosef David Azulai, and Giovanni Bernardo

de Rossi, to name a few of the most prominent early modern collectors of Hebrew and Jewish books, require careful study. Such work has the potential to challenge a range of historiographic commonplaces about the origins of Jewish scholarship in the nineteenth century. In this instance we lack a history of the consumption of the *Shulḥan 'arukh*. Who owned the book or books? Which editions did they possess? How many people had access to a given copy of the work? Answers to such questions might complement and complicate the reception histories provided by Reiner and Davis.

Censorship, reception history, libraries, editing, and manuscript and print—these are only a few of the numerous areas where the methods employed by historians of the book have the potential to open fields inquiry for scholars of the early modern Jewish past. But there are many others: the relationship between reading and writing, the history of correspondence and letters, the development of periodicals and reference works, and the relationships between Hebrew and vernacular literatures. To return to Kant: In the midst of his discussion of piracy, Kant posited an opposition between the book as a discourse or idea and the book as a material object. Of course, books were also many other things. They were commodities, keepsakes, and sacred objects. In these senses too, the history of the early modern Jewish book has yet to be written.

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## NOTES

- 1 Moritz Steinschneider, *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana* (Berlin: Ad. Friedlander, 1852–1860); photographic reprint (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1964), i: “Catalogus noster, quem a potiori, ‘Catalogum librorum hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana’ denominavimus, recensionem exhibet maxima ex parte concisam et pressam librorum stricte hebraicorum atque nonnullorum, qui ad literaturam Judaicam quodammodo pertinent.”
- 2 For Levita, entry 4960, p. 934; for Spinoza entry 7262, p. 2650; for Da Fano entry 6342, p. 1719.
- 3 Entry 7271, p. 2653.
- 4 Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 71. On Kant and piracy see Adrian Johns, *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars from Gutenberg to Gates* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 54–55.
- 5 R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, Joseph Karo: *Lawyer and Mystic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); Rabbi Yosef Karo, ed. Isaac Raphael (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1969); Meir Benayahu, Yosef Behiri (Jerusalem: Yad ha-Rav Nissim, 1990); Isadore Twersky, “The Shulhan 'Aruk: Enduring Code of Jewish Law,” *Judaism* 16 (1967): 141–58; David B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 99–103.
- 6 Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 72.
- 7 Solomon Schechter, “Safed in the Sixteenth Century—A City of Legists and Mystics,” in *Studies in Judaism: Second Series* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1908), 202–306.
- 8 Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “From Safed to Venice: The Shulhan 'Aruk and the Censor,” in *Tradition, Heterodoxy, and Religious Culture*, ed. Chanita Goodblatt and Howard Kreisler (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006), 91–115.
- 9 For a general survey, see David Werner Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books in Italy* (Philadelphia: J. H. Greenstone, 1909). For Safed, see Raz-Krakotzkin, “From Safed to Venice.” For Yiddish, see Chava Turniansky and Erika Timm, *Yiddish in Italia: Yiddish Manuscripts and Printed Books from the 15th to the 17th Century* (Milan: Association of the Italian Friends of the Hebrew University, 2003). For the Bible, see Jordan S. Penkower, “Jacob Ben H. ayyim and the Rise of the Biblia Rabbinica” (Doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1982). For the Talmud, see Marvin J. Heller, *Printing the Talmud: A History of the Earliest Printed Editions of the Talmud* (Brooklyn: Im Hasefer, 1992).
- 10 On the burning of the Talmud, see Kenneth Stow, “The Burning of the Talmud in 1553 in Light of sixteenth-century Catholic Attitudes toward the Talmud,” in *Jewish Life in Early Modern Rome* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 1–25. On Hebrew printing in Italy prior to the burning of the Talmud see Isaiah Sonne, “Tiyulim be-historiyah u-bibliografiyah” [Journeys through History and Bibliography] *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 209–35; Robert Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Littman Library, 1990).
- 11 On the censorship of Hebrew books,

- see Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text: The Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
- 12 Martin Lowry, *The World of Aldus Manutius: Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979).
- 13 Naftali Ben Menahem, "Ha-defusim ha-rishonim shel 'ha-Shulh. an 'arukh'" [The First Editions of the Shulhan 'arukh], in Rabbi Yosef Karo, ed. Raphael, 101.
- 14 Elchanan Reiner, "The Ashkenazi Elite at the Beginning of the Modern Era: Manuscript versus Printed Book," *Polin* 10 (1997), 85–98; Joseph Davis, "The Reception of the Shulhan 'Arukh and the Formation of Ashkenazic Jewish Identity," *AJS Review* 26 (2002), 251–76.
- 15 Twersky, "The Shulhan 'Arukh: Enduring Code of Jewish Law," 146.
- 16 Hayim ben Bezalel leveled a range of criticisms against Isserles, including his opposition to the principle of codification. However, he clearly articulated his opposition to the category of "Ashkenaz" as one that had obliterated any variation in custom among Jews who hailed from distinct geographic areas. See principle 9, Hayim ben Bezalel, *Vikuaḥ mayim hayim* (Amsterdam, 1711), 6a. On this figure, see Reiner, "The Ashkenazi Elite at the Beginning of the Modern Era," 86 n. 2.
- 17 Michael Stanislawski, "The Yiddish Shevet Yehudah: A Study in the 'Ashkenization' of a Spanish Jewish Classic," in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 134–49.
- 18 David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order, 1450–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13–16.
- 19 Brian Richardson, *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- 20 Reiner, "The Ashkenazi Elite at the Beginning of the Modern Era," 98.
- 21 Paolo Trovato, *Con ogni diligenza corretto: la stampa e le revisioni editoriali dei testi letterari italiani (1470–1570)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991); Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 22 Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680–1750* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).
- 23 For a study of a later period that might potentially serve as a model for the sixteenth and seventeenth century, see Zeev Gries, "The Hasidic Managing Editor as an Agent of Culture," in *Hasidism Reappraised*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert (Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1996).
- 24 Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text*; Gila Prebor, "Sefer ha-Ziqiq by Domenico Gerosolimitano," (*Hebrew) Italia* 18 (2008): 7–93; Shifra Baruchson-Arbib and Gila Prebor, "Sefer ha-Ziqiq: The Book's Use and Its Influence on Hebrew Printing," *La Bibliofilia* 109 (2007): 3–31.
- 25 Adam Shear, *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Boaz Huss, *Ke-Zohar ha-Rakia* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute and Mossad Bialik, 2008); Allan Nadler, "The Besht as Spinozist: Abraham Krochmal's Preface to Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Mikhtav," in *Rabbinic Culture and Its Critics: Jewish Authority, Dissent, and Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, ed. Daniel Frank and Matt Goldish (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008); Daniel B. Schwartz, "The Spinoza Image in Jewish Culture, 1656–1956" (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 2007).
- 26 Debora K. Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). For Moses Mendelssohn's Bible, see Edward Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans, and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).
- 27 See the remark of Richard Popkin about the *Guide of the Perplexed* in Buxtorf's Latin translation: "Although one finds it cited all over the place, and although one finds edition of it in many, many private libraries of Christian scholars, there is as yet no study of the impact of Maimonides on 17th-century European thought." In "Some Further Comments on Newton and Maimonides," in *Essays on the Context, Nature, and Influence of Isaac Newton's Theology*, ed. James E. Force and Richard Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1990), 2.
- 28 See *Sifriyot ve-ofsei sefarim*, ed. Yosef Kaplan and Moshe Sluhovskiy (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2006). For the period under consideration here see the articles by Yosef Kaplan, Claude B. Stuczynski, and Avriël Bar-Levav.
- 29 Yael Okun, "Ha-yahas she-ben kitve yad le-defusim be-sifriyato shel I"SH G"R" [The Relationship between Manuscript and Prints in the Library of Ish Ger], *Asufot* 10 (1997): 267–86; Isaiah Sonne, "Book Lists through Three Centuries," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 1 (1953): 55–72; 2, 3–19; Robert Bonfil, *Ha-Rabanut be-Italyah be-Tekufat ha-Renesans* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), 295–98 lists forty-one published and unpublished book lists from Italy until 1540. The references to Sonne and Bonfil are as cited in Menachem Schmelzer, "A Fifteenth-Century Book List," in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography and Medieval Hebrew Poetry* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2006), 83, n. 4; Shifra Baruchson, *Sefarim ve-kor'im* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993); Joseph R. Hacker, "Ha-Midrash ha-Sefardi: Sifriyah Ziburit Yehudit" ["Public Libraries of Hispanic Jewry in the Late Medieval and Early-Modern Periods"], *Rishonim ve-Aharonim: meh. karim be-toldot Yisrael mugashim le-Avraham Grossman*, ed. Joseph R. Hacker, Yosef Kaplan, and B. Z. Kedar (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2010).
- 30 Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), chap. 3. However, see the discussion of the term *midrash* in Hacker, "Public Libraries of Hispanic Jewry in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods," 277–81.

The background of the entire page is a dark blue, slightly blurred image of a scroll with Hebrew text. The text is written in a traditional, calligraphic style and is oriented vertically, running from top to bottom. The scroll appears to be unrolled, with the text following the curve of the scroll. The lighting is soft, creating a sense of depth and texture.

# The Jewish Book and Beyond in Modern Times

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How might one begin to think about the Jewish book in the modern era? The period is defined by unprecedented proliferation—not only of many new books, but also of an array of new kinds of books, as well as a plethora of new print and other communications technologies, new professions and institutions associated one way or another with books, and new text practices. This burgeoning volume of material, as well as the expansive range of possibilities for books and how they figure in Jewish life, demand that those who would study the place of the book in modern Jewish life (up to and including contemporary phenomena) would do well to begin with reconnaissance, casting the net wide and considering which larger issues this wealth of materials and practices suggests for further study. This survey not only yields an impressive roster of potential subjects of inquiry; the information itself suggests possibilities for understanding Jewish books and book practices as a defining feature of modern Jewish life.

To begin, consider new communications technologies, which are hallmarks of the modern age. Starting with the invention of lithography in 1796—the first major development in printing technology since Gutenberg’s introduction of moveable type in the West ca. 1439—barely a decade has gone by without the advent of some new medium or technological innovation: the typewriter (1829), photography and telegraphy (both 1839), modern postal systems (starting in the 1840s), the facsimile (later, fax) machine (1843), the mimeograph and telephone (both in 1876), hot metal typesetting (1886), commercial sound recordings and silent motion pictures (both in the 1890s), photo-offset printing (1903), “talking” motion pictures and radio (1920s), mass-market paperback books (1930s), television and audiotape (1940s), videotape and photocopying (1960s), and, in recent decades, the microchip, personal computer, laser printer, CD-ROM, Internet, cell phone, iPod, e-book. All of these technologies have had an impact on book production and reading culture, some directly and others more obliquely but no less significantly. Beyond the

innovative consequences of any one of these technologies, the cumulative impact of this cascade of new media shapes book culture by situating it in a constant evaluation of older communications technologies in relation to newer ones.<sup>1</sup>

No less transformative is the impact of new kinds of content in Jewish books. Most obvious is the advent of a secular literature, both belletristic and academic, identified as “Jewish.” This development not only entails a new corpus of material, but also engenders a whole set of new practices around these books: writing, publishing, selling, reading, collecting, inventorying, teaching, critiquing. This new print culture was understood at the time of its advent as central to the realization of modern Jewish culture. Thus, *maskilim* were distinguished as much by what they read—as well as where, when, and with whom—as by changes in their conduct or belief.<sup>2</sup> Alongside books, newspapers and other serialized publications—journals, magazines, bulletins, annuals, almanacs, calendars—emerge as important new forms of print in Jewish life.<sup>3</sup> Even as they facilitate new reading practices, these various periodicals complement book culture (e.g., publishing reviews of books) and sometimes incorporate it (e.g., printing serialized novels in periodicals before these works appear in book form). These periodicals also have engendered a new Jewish profession—journalism—with a complicated relationship to the emerging concept of the “Jewish author.” Consider, for example, the many Jewish writers of prose and poetry for whom being a journalist constituted a “day job” and who sometimes even published their journalism under pseudonyms in the same publications in which their literary efforts appeared.<sup>4</sup>

Modern Jewish scholarship similarly creates new kinds of writers and introduces new kinds of books into Jewish life. Of special interest are reference works—bibliographies, dictionaries, encyclopedias—that model new ways of conceptualizing Jewish knowledge as well as providing new kinds of content. As modern Jewish scholarship engendered new notions of how Jews should be educated, new Jewish pedagogical materials have appeared, including the advent of Jewish children’s literature.<sup>5</sup>

Attending this expansion of secular Jewish books are new kinds of translations. Most notable are, first, works of world literature and scholarship

rendered in modern Jewish languages (Hebrew, Judezmo, Yiddish), thereby redefining Jewish literacy in terms of traditional languages that were themselves being transformed by notions of modernity; second, translations of literary works originally written in these Jewish languages into other languages, which reconfigured the place of Jewish writing in world literature. At the same time, new print technologies and practices have enabled the proliferation of anti-Semitism (epitomized by the many translations and editions of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*), making the collection and study of these works a subject of Jewish scholarship in itself. Such developments only further complicate the ongoing challenge of defining what constitutes a “Jewish book.”

This interpenetration of Jewish books and those of other cultures is emblematic of the modern Jewish integration into modern cultural and political mainstreams. With this integration has come increased regulation of published materials, in the form of state censorship and legislation governing copyright, plagiarism, obscenity, libel, and the like. These laws both restrict and protect the possibilities of Jewish books while situating them within national systems of authorship and publication. Conversely, Jewish books sometimes figure as potent symbols of Jewish ideas or of Jews themselves in modern political actions, notably in book bans and, during the Nazi era, book burnings that deliberately echoed medieval practice.

Recent technological innovations not only make books available in new forms (e.g., e-books) but also provide new kinds of engagement with the written word. Sound recordings of books (on records, tapes, CDs, MP3 files) disseminate texts as performances, as do film and broadcast adaptations. Digitized texts on CD-ROMs or on the Internet facilitate new possibilities for searching and cross-referencing these texts’ contents. Blogs, wikis, open-source publishing, and other online platforms and social software enable new forms of collaborative writing and sharing of texts, as well as responding to them.

These transformations of the book as a discrete, physical object take place even as new institutions for housing and disseminating books and new reading practices continue to develop. The modern age is witness to the creation of modern lending libraries and the professionalization of

librarians, including the specialty of Judaica librarianship. The innovations of marketing and advertising, as well as developments in printing and distribution systems, have transformed Jewish publishing houses and created another specialist: the Judaica editor.<sup>6</sup> Jewish booksellers' catalogs become resources in themselves, not only for potential customers of the moment, but also as vintage ephemera, for scholars of book practices of the past. The promotion of Jewish books in the modern age has prompted new relationships between book publishers and other Jewish community institutions, manifest in the establishment of Jewish Book Month, Jewish book fairs, as well as local book clubs and reading groups. Jewish literature has become a subject of study in the academy as well as a fixture of community education. A metaliterature of criticism, canon debates, readers' guides, "best book" lists, and so on, surrounds this ever-growing inventory of books and facilitates the modern institutionalization of Jewish reading practices. These activities, long realized in print and oral culture, now take place as well on the Internet and are informed by new facilities of searching, hyperlinking, and interactive social media.

Jewish book culture in the modern age engenders new epiphenomena, reflecting developments in Jewish book practices and other cultural arenas. There is an auxiliary material culture of Judaica bookplates, bookends, bookmarks, and the like, as well as the appearance of books in logos of Jewish institutions or, continuing a long-standing practice, as decorative motifs on tombstones to denote the grave of a learned Jew. Book design generally is transformed by new printing technologies (including the invention of the dust jacket for mass-produced hardcover books, beginning in the 1820s) and the new professions of graphic designers and illustrators. At the same time, the advent of the "art" book—including one-of-a-kind works by visual artists as well as limited runs of "deluxe" editions—provides opportunities for collaborations between modern Jewish artists and writers (epitomized by the work of Jews in the Soviet avantgarde of the 1920s) in addition to major artists' illustrations of "classic" and sacred Jewish texts.<sup>7</sup> The growing interest in old Jewish books as collectibles has prompted a growth in the professional connoisseurship of antiquarian Jewish publications, introduced the conservator into Jewish

book culture, and engendered the display of books in Jewish museums and other public venues.

The epiphenomena of the modern Jewish book extend to other cultural works inspired, one way or another, by individual books or by book culture more generally. Stage, film, and broadcast adaptations of Jewish books, sacred or secular, are perhaps the most obvious examples, but this category also includes works of visual art that represent Jewish books. These artworks range from Moritz Oppenheim's 1866 painting *Sabbath Rest*—which juxtaposes, in an eighteenth century German Jewish ghetto genre scene, a traditional matriarch reading aloud to her family (presumably from the *Tsene-rene*) and a younger, "modern" Jewish woman, off in a room by herself, reading a novel—to Anselm Kiefer's *Breaking of the Vessels* (1990), inspired by the artist's interest in Kabbalah, a monumental sculpture of an oversized shelf of books, made out of sheets of lead, bursting with shards of glass. In popular culture, images of Jewish writers have been reproduced on postcards, medals, currency, or stamps, thereby situating authors as cultural heroes. Several museums and other cultural institutions (in addition to public libraries) center on one or more books: the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, opened in 1960, and visited by millions who have read her diary since its first publication in 1947; the Shrine of the Book, erected in 1965 in Jerusalem to house the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947; and the National Yiddish Book Center, which was established in Amherst, Massachusetts in 1980. Book culture has inspired the occasional work of performance or installation art. Recent examples include Ben Katchor and Mark Mulcahy's 2004 musical theater piece *The Rosenbach Company*, which dramatizes the history of the famous Philadelphia-based family of Jewish antiquarian book dealers and offers a meditation on the cultural practice of collecting; *Babylon Poems*, a 2007 installation by the Sala-manca group, media/performance artists based in Jerusalem, which translates a selection of familiar modern Hebrew poems from and then back to the original Hebrew through a series of fourteen different languages, using "Babylon" translation software; *Playing God*, Alan Berliner's media installation of 2009, in which the artist takes the 837 words that appear in the biblical creation story (using an English translation of the Hebrew Bible) and creates

an interactive game in which the visitor is invited to play with a seemingly random reshuffling of these words on a row of seven video monitors.

Innovations in Jewish book culture are by no means limited to secular publications and practices. Jewish religious groups across the spectrum have availed themselves of innovations in print technologies and in some cases have pioneered new strategies in the production and promotion of Jewish books. A contemporary case in point is ArtScroll, the New York-based Orthodox publishing house, which has engendered new notions of religious practice through its extensive catalog of publications, especially translations of sacred texts used in study and worship.<sup>8</sup> The impact of ArtScroll follows a larger turn in Orthodox practice in the post-World War II era that places greater emphasis on the authority of print culture, superseding mimetic mastery of religious practice.<sup>9</sup>

Modern innovations in book culture even have consequences for the oldest and most enduring of Jewish books: the Torah scroll. These innovations do not center on the text, whose reproduction by scribes on parchment, in keeping with ancient protocols, continues to materialize holy writ as a sacred object. Rather, new practices concern Torah scrolls as valuable material objects that sometimes have histories of contested provenance. In recent years, new technologies, such as laser scanning, have been employed to identify Torah scrolls in order to ensure their return to their proper owners in cases of theft. Torah scrolls that had been confiscated from European Jewish communities during World War II and subsequently were recovered have taken on powerful new symbolic value as objects of Holocaust remembrance, displayed in museums and synagogues in the United States and elsewhere far from their prewar homes.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most venerable of Jewish book practices—Talmud study—has engendered a remarkable series of innovations by dint of the cascade of new media of the past century. These recent developments rest on a much longer history of practices centered on this core text of rabbinic Judaism. As scholars of the early modern period have noted, printed folios of the Talmud, first published in the late fifteenth century, expanded the engagement in rabbinic text study among Jewish boys and men throughout the Diaspora. Beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, photo-offset

reproductions of the 1880–1886 “Vilna Romm Shas” not only canonized this edition as definitive but also presented scholars with a *daf* of unprecedented standardization in both content and form. (The value invested in fixing the format of the *daf* is implicit in the “pin test,” in which yeshiva students are challenged to identify the words through which a pin, stuck into a page of the Talmud at random, passes on subsequent pages, a skill that relies on memorization of the text as well as knowing its placement on the page.)<sup>11</sup> The standardized *daf* also facilitated the institution of *Daf Yomi*—inaugurated by Rabbi Meir Shapiro at the First World Congress of the World Agudath Israel, held in Vienna in 1923—as an international practice that both promotes and regulates Talmud study within a modular rubric.

Other innovations facilitate access to the Talmud either for those who cannot read Hebrew and Aramaic or for those who do not attend a *shiur* or otherwise receive oral instruction in how to engage this elliptical text on their own: These include modern published translations of the Talmud (or selected tractates) into German, English, Russian, French, Yiddish, or Modern Hebrew; anthologies of talmudic aphorisms; and entry-level guidebooks explaining how to study the Talmud (including *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Understanding the Talmud*).<sup>12</sup> In the post-World War II era, electronic media have enabled new forms of Talmud study: Radio broadcasts of *Daf Hashavu’ah* by Rabbi Mordechai Pinchas Teitz aired in New York on WEVD from 1953 until 1988; *Dial-a-Daf*, initiated by Rabbi Chaim Eliyahu Teitelbaum, began in the 1980s as did the reproduction of *shiurim* (including Teitz’s broadcasts) on cassette tapes. Among the more provocative consequences of these innovations is the unprecedented, albeit vicarious, access now offered to Jewish women to the Orthodox *shiur*.<sup>13</sup>

The advent of digitized versions of the Talmud in the 1990s, first on CD-ROM and more recently on DVD and the Internet, presents new opportunities for scholarly engagement with this text as well as new challenges. The ability to cross-reference the Talmud’s extensive text using a search engine tests the longstanding centrality of memorization to talmudic erudition. Indeed, publishers of this and other canonical Jewish religious texts in digitized, searchable form often tout their wares as providing something

akin to instant expertise. DBS International Corporation, publishers of *Torah Treasures*, promotes its product as “an entire wall-to-wall library” of sacred texts on “two small disks” that are “designed for maximum ease of use and efficiency by even the most novice of users!...The user-friendly interface will appeal to all and transform previously tedious searching and page flipping into a fun journey of exploration!”<sup>14</sup>

Having the Talmud in a digitized, searchable format will certainly change how the text is taught and studied, but aspects of its traditional pedagogy will doubtless endure. Note, for example, that whereas earlier digital versions of the Talmud did not reproduce the formatting of the printed page, more recent versions preserve the “*tsuras hadaf*.” DVDaf, published by Judaica software company Dafka Corporation, uses digital technology to “blend a visual image of the standard Talmud page with English, Hebrew, or Yiddish audio lessons for every page to provide a truly unparalleled learning experience. Click any part of the page, and you are instantly whisked to a ‘virtual’ classroom, as you hear the voice of an experienced Talmud teacher explaining that section.” This tool also provides “hyperlinks to all references cited by the Ein Mishpat, as well as all references cited in the Gemara, Rashi and Tosafos” and includes a “DafYomi calendar ... for your Palm Pilot.”<sup>15</sup> As venerable modes of engaging the Talmud are integrated with new technologies, study of this text is reconceived as adventure.

The Talmud is now also available in searchable form on the Internet, in the original Hebrew/Aramaic and in English translation. (In the latter form, it has frequently turned up, through Internet searches, on an anti-Semitic Web site, to the consternation of Jewish scholars—an unanticipated consequence of this new facility.)<sup>16</sup> The Internet also provides access to downloadable *dafyomi shiurim* and online *hevrotot* convened via e-mail, instant messaging, or Skype. Talmud classes are even offered for avatars in the virtual environment of *Second Life*.<sup>17</sup> These innovations have the potential to transform the social practices around Talmud study further, even while striving to maintain established approaches to the text.<sup>18</sup>

The future of the book—currently a subject of intense debate among publishers, authors, scholars, and readers—has never been more urgent a concern. The expanding interest in studying book culture and text

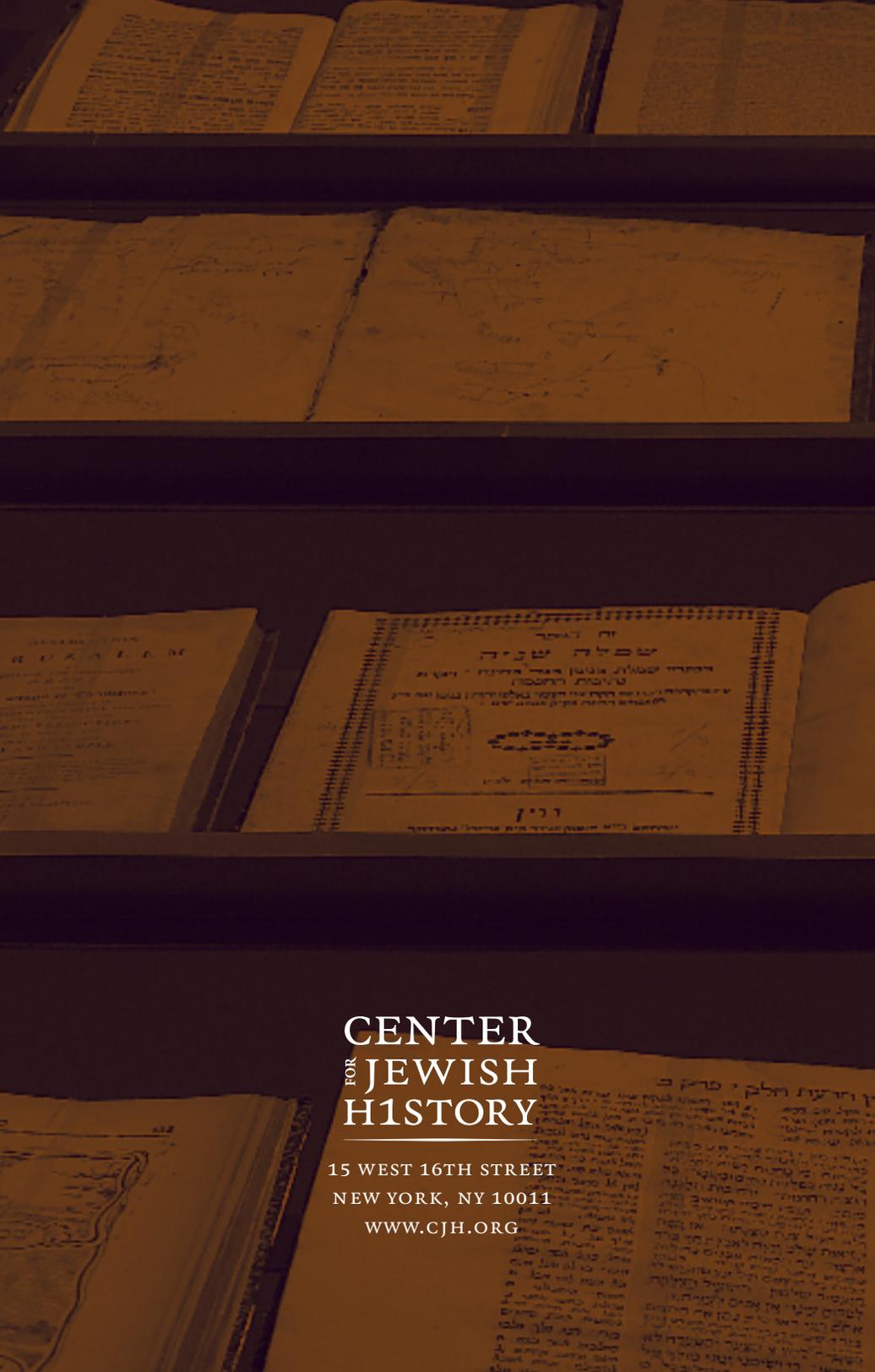
practices responds, in part, to the pressing demand that we question long-held assumptions about the place of books in our lives. The scope of these assumptions is vast, extending to concerns about changes in human cognition, cultural literacy, economies of information, and the social practices of communication, among other issues. Recent developments driving the debate over the future of the book may sometimes seem to pose daunting challenges to the long-standing centrality of books to Jewish studies; these developments also provide rich opportunities for further study that will prove strategic to understanding Jewish life, looking to the past as well as the future.

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## NOTES

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- 9 Menachem Friedman, “Life Tradition and Book Tradition in the Development of Ultraorthodox Judaism,” in Harvey E. Goldberg, ed., *Judaism Viewed from Within and from Without: Anthropological Studies* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987), 235–56; Haym Soloveitchik, “Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” *Tradition* 28, no. 4 (1994): 64–130.
10. On the “Holocaust Torah,” see Vanessa L. Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2007), 187–213.
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- 14 DBS International Corp., <http://dbsus.com/> (accessed February 22, 2010). 15. Davka Corporation, DVDaf, [www.davka.com/cgi-bin/product.cgi?product=355](http://www.davka.com/cgi-bin/product.cgi?product=355) (accessed February 22, 2010).
- 16 See H-Judaic, Jewish Studies Network (JSN), Digest, Sept. 19–20, 2007 (2007-89), and Sept. 22–23, 2007 (2007-92) at [www.h-net.org/ffijudaic/](http://www.h-net.org/ffijudaic/).
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