

A PROLEGOMENON TO THE STUDY OF JEWISH CULTURAL HISTORY*

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CULTURAL HISTORY

The notion of cultural history and cultural studies in general, as usually employed in contemporary academic discourse, is derived from social anthropology. The cultural historian reads texts and other historical sources and studies artifacts, not so much as discursive expositions. Rather, like an anthropologist studying live behavior, the historian seeks both to discover the ways people in the society in question construed meaning and to develop a catalogue of the fundamental concepts that mediated interpretation of reality and ordered experience for them. Cultural history might be summed up as “a history of meaning and feelings broadly defined, as embedded in expressive practices widely observed.”¹

In this way cultural history differs from social history which emphasizes institutions: their structure, their social functions and their effects.² Contemporary cultural history is also distinct from a different type of “cultural history,” namely the history of creative production; whether elite, popular or material: literature, art, tools,

* With particular reference to the case of the history of the Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the early modern period. Virtually all examples will be drawn from this instance. While I am attracted to this case because it is my own research interest, I believe that the issues raised here are generally applicable, at least through early modern times.

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¹ The quote is from J. C. Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought 1550–1750* (Cambridge, 1986), p. xii. For a survey of approaches to cultural history today, see Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989). For examples of essays in cultural history, see Roger Chartier, *Cultural History* (Ithaca, 1988). For models of contemporary Jewish cultural historiography, see the many studies by Elliott Horowitz; for example, “The Early Eighteenth Century Confronts the Beard: Kabbalah and Jewish Self-Fashioning,” *Jewish History* 8 (1994), pp. 115; “The Rite to Be Reckless: On the Perpetration and Interpretation of Purim Violence,” *Poetics Today* 15 (1994), pp. 9–54.

² An example of social historiography in the context of Polish-Jewish history is Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, B. D. Cooperman, trans. and ed. (New York, 1993); originally published in Hebrew in Jerusalem in 1958 and translated without the notes and with many inaccuracies in 1961.

architecture, scholarship, philosophy, food, etc.³ The new cultural history does study the products of creativity, but not to trace the process of their creation or to summarize their contents *per se*. The current goal is to determine the meaning that these products encode. The description must therefore be “thick” and the interpretation “deep”; famous terms, now more than a generation old, that connote the need to place individual cultural phenomena within a fully articulated cultural-social context and to understand the meanings that adhere to them.⁴

Cultural history should, in my view, also include a psychological perspective; but one that has been developed only relatively recently. Jerome Bruner⁵ has attempted to define a new branch of psychology, called cultural psychology.

The program of cultural psychology is... to show how human minds and lives are reflections of culture and history as well as of biology and physical resources.⁶ [In the study of Self cultural psychology mandates] focus upon the *meanings* in terms of which Self is defined *both* by the individual *and* by the culture in which he or she participates... By a *culture's* definition of Selfhood... I mean more than what contemporary Others, as it were, take as their working definition of Selves in general and of a particular Self... For there is a historical dimension as well. If Gergen's Self is “Self from the outside in,” the historical Self is “Self from the past to the present.” In our own culture, for example, views of Self are shaped and buttressed by our Judeo-Christian theology and by the new Humanism that emerged in the Renaissance.⁷

For Bruner the “dialogue dependence” of Self formation implies a dialogue, or a “transactional relationship,” not only with a contemporary Generalized Other but with an individual's historical legacy as well.⁸ As he notes in discussing the Goodhertz family, a subject of his cultural psychological analysis,

The lives and Selves we have been exploring are, to be sure, shaped by intrapsychic forces operating in the here and now... But to let the matter rest at that is to rob the Goodhertzes of history and to impoverish our own understanding of their lives and their plight. For individually and as a family they are, always have been, and never can escape being expressions of social and historical forces. Whatever constituted those “forces,” whatever view one may take of historical forces, they were converted into human meanings, into

³ For examples of this approach in Polish and Jewish history see Aleksander Bruckner, *Polish Cultural History* [Polish] 3 vols. (Warsaw, 1958); Moses Shulvass, *East European Jewish Culture: The Classical Period* (New York, 1975).

⁴ See Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Studies II* (London, 1971); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).

⁵ *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, 1990).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.138.

⁷ *Ibid.* 116–117, emphases in the original.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 101.

language, into narratives, and found their way into the minds of men and women.⁹

With this in mind it would be appropriate to approach the cultural history of a traditional society, as Jewish society was everywhere until the onset of modernity, by examining the history of the interaction of a society and its members with their collective history. Research can focus on how historical traditions are “converted into human meanings” and “find their way into the minds of men and women” on the collective/societal—as opposed to the individual/psychological—level. The objective is to clarify how society in the present mediates the heritage of the past to facilitate meaningful life into the future.

The advantage to this approach is that it begins where the people under study assumed they were beginning: with received tradition. It privileges, as they did, the legacy of the past. The researcher sees, however, that tradition was in dialectic with the conditions of the present; neither automatically dominant nor dominated but always a factor with which to contend; sometimes victorious, but sometimes altered or even subtly rejected. This kind of cultural history examines how traditional categories for ordering experience and investing life with meaning were transformed in reaction with other elements.

A text from one of the leading Ashkenazic rabbinic authorities in history, Rabbi Moses Isserles of Cracow, who lived in the sixteenth century, can lend brief insight into this type of cultural history:

Some have written that a menstruating woman may not enter the synagogue or pray or speak God’s name or touch a [holy] book; while some say that such a woman is permitted to do all of these things—and this opinion is primary. However, the custom in these lands [Poland and Ashkenaz] follows the first position; but during the “white” days [i.e. the seven days between the cessation of the menses and the resumption of sexual contact between wife and husband] they would permit [these things]. And even where they are strict [in the application of the restrictive custom], on the high holidays and other such occasions, when many gather to go to the synagogue, it is permitted for [menstruating women] to go to the synagogue like other women, because it causes them great distress when everyone assembles and they stand outside.¹⁰

The genesis of the opinion expressed here by Rabbi Isserles is the biblical-talmudic precept that a menstruating woman [Hebrew: *niddah*] is ritually impure. As such, during the time of the Temple, she would be considered impure for the purposes of the ritual there. In addition, up to and including the present day, a menstruant is barred from any physical contact with her husband. In traditional Jewish

⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 136–137.

¹⁰ This passage appears in the *Mappa*, Isserles’ glosses on the *Shulhan Arukh*, Orah Haim 88:1.

society the complex rules governing menstruating women's behavior were a foundation stone of ritual life, akin to kashrut and Sabbath observance.¹¹

In late antiquity in Eretz Israel and especially in medieval Ashkenaz popular customs developed that went beyond the proscriptions mandated by talmudic law, including forbidding menstruating women from any "holy activity" such as the examples Isserles mentioned. By the fifteenth century, however, the distress that the customary exclusion caused was taken into account by the important German rabbi Israel Isserlein (1390–1460), who set a precedent for part of Isserles' ruling by permitting menstruating women to attend the synagogue on the high holidays and such "because it brought them distress and melancholy when everyone gathered to be together and they stood outside."¹²

While Isserles explicitly recognized the legally non-binding nature of the extra restrictions, he was evidently both resigned to their entrenchment among significant sectors of the populace, and well aware of the dissension that they aroused with others. Evidently, the trend implied by Rabbi Isserlein in the fifteenth century had continued and there were more and more women (and their husbands?) who were not prepared to refrain from public ritual participation because of the expanded strictures. For them, the significance of public religious expression, as well as the social experience it entailed, overrode the meaning of the exclusionary practices. Isserles' response, in addition to denying the legal validity of the supernumerary prohibitions, was to reiterate Isserlein's indulgent ruling with regard to major holidays and to affirm another way of mitigating the popular custom, that was itself probably an already existing popular expedient; namely, leniency with regard to the "white" days.

Thus a traditional category—menstrual impurity—retained basic meaningfulness over the ages, but came to be interpreted and applied differentially by Jewish societies in different eras. In this case the prohibition was variably elaborated and relaxed. Jews did not disconnect from a cardinal practice and what it represented; but a particular mandate of tradition might be either intensified or attenuated in dialectic with other values that gained or lost their own meaning for society in various ages.

¹¹ For discussion of the category of *niddah*, see the article by I. Ta-Shma in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 12:1141–1148; C. E. Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford, 2000); R. R. Wasserfall, ed., *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law* (Hanover, 1999).

¹² On the history, development and halakhic status of these customs see A. Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Europe in the Middle Ages* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 2001), pp. 47–51, 318–319 and esp. the literature cited on p. 48 n. 106; J. R. Woolf, "Medieval Models of Purity and Sanctity: Ashkenazic Women in the Synagogue," in: *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. M. J. H. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Leiden, 2000), pp. 263–280. The quote from R. Isserlein appears in his miscellaneous rulings and writings compiled and edited by S. Avitan in *Terumat Ha-Deshen*, part II (Jerusalem, 1991), no. 132 p. 377; cf. *Seder Mitzvot Nashim* (Cracow 1577), par. 77 (My thanks to Prof. Edward Fram for this last reference). For further studies of women and the synagogue, see S. Grossman and R. Haut, eds., *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue* (Philadelphia, 1992).

ISSUES OF CULTURE

The objective of writing the cultural history of the Jews (at least up until the twentieth century) can be construed, then, as the elucidation of the ways in which traditional categories of meaning have been transmitted and transmuted in order to shape and express meaning for the generation under study. To do so, however, it is important to take into account a number of issues that are perennially associated with research in Jewish cultural history.

The Elusiveness of Historicist Analysis

Historians are trained to contextualize. Much of historical explanation is in essence supplying the historical context of a particular phenomenon. Sources are usually approached with the goal of uncovering what they indicate about the particular circumstances of the people and society that produced them. For example, typically, in analyzing a source we seek to explicate what we can learn from it about the time and place of its composition that will identify it with its era and locale and help to distinguish these from other places and periods. However, when dealing with traditional Jewish sources, whose authors regarded themselves as transmitting tradition and tended to efface the signs of their own time and place, historicizing can be problematic.

A good example of this is R. Isserles' *Mappa*,¹³ glosses on the *Shulhan Arukh* law code of Joseph Karo, from which the preceding example regarding female synagogue attendance was taken. Isserles cited the gamut of medieval Ashkenazic halakhic sources and claimed that the very *raison d'être* of his work was to give them their expression and their due. How much of his citation of halakhic sources is particularly sixteenth century or particularly Polish? With the exception of sporadic, explicit, salient examples (such as the one adduced above), how different are his halakhic decisions from those of his predecessors in thirteenth century Ashkenaz? When he emphasized a particular subject was there necessarily something more to it than a

¹³ This composition does not exist in manuscript versions and was never published as an independent book. It was intended to be read in tandem with the *Shulhan Arukh* of Joseph Karo and indeed represents a new redaction of that work which effectively converted it into a halakhic textbook; see E. Reiner, "The Ashkenazi Elite at the Beginning of the Modern Era: Manuscript versus the Printed Book," *Polin* 10 (1997), p. 97. The *Mappa's* publishing history begins when one part of a combined edition of the two works was printed in Cracow in 1571. This volume quickly sold out and the entire double work was published, again in Cracow, in 1578–1580. (This edition was re-published in facsimile, *Shulhan Arukh*, 2 vols. [Jerusalem, 1974].) Subsequently, every standard edition of the *Shulhan Arukh* has incorporated the *Mappa*. Perhaps more than any other factor it was this joining of the rulings of two prominent halakhic authorities—one Sephardic, one Ashkenazic—that enabled the *Shulhan Arukh* to attain canonical halakhic status throughout most of the Jewish world. Their mode of juxtaposition in one work indicated essential agreement on the fundamental questions of the need for codification and the possibility of arriving at a halakhic consensus—albeit filled with demurrers, fine-tuning remarks and agreements to disagree.

loyal continuation of the hermeneutic and homiletic traditions he inherited? When he took sides in a halakhic dispute was there always something of his own society's problems influencing him or was he typically engaged in a closed circuit intellectual endeavor, insulated from the pressures of everyday life?

Some scholars have successfully contended with the daunting task of identifying differences between treatments of like halakhic problems in sources from different environments. They then have explained how those differences allude to the specific conditions in which their authors lived.¹⁴ This is a necessary and important historiographical approach. There is, however, an additional, and perhaps tougher problem; not the exegesis of differences but their frequent absence. Practically speaking, historians who have tried to use halakhic and other rabbinic works as indices of the issues, attitudes, and *mentalité* of the societies of their authors have repeatedly come up against the fact that these same issues, attitudes and *mentalité*—and the modes of expressing them—are present in earlier works with but negligible differences. The later authors can be seen to be repeating themes and motifs that are part of their received tradition rather than representing their own time and place.

As summarized by Mendel Piekarz, who criticized the efforts of scholars of Hasidism to define its characteristic theological and spiritual features by studying the words of the early Tzaddikim:¹⁵

The more deeply I probed the literary substance of the homiletical and moralistic literature, including the writings of Jacob Joseph of Polonne, the more I came to realize that various ideas and literary motifs which appear to be emblematic of their generation were actually the product of long ago ages and their literary source was the classic moralistic books... as well as works written a generation or two before Hasidism.

The conclusion of Piekarz's study was that the theological innovations usually credited to Hasidism were not new at all and that the movement's essence must be found in other of its features.

The difficulty is not only a practical one of developing the hermeneutic tools that allow for identifying the historical contingency of source material. One very influential school of scholarship insists that even in theory rabbinic texts are

¹⁴ For example, important differences between Polish and other Ashkenazic practice, and what they say about Polish-Jewish life, are explicated in E. Fram, *Ideals Face Reality: Jewish Law and Life in Poland, 1550–1655* (Cincinnati, 1997); see also H. H. Ben-Sasson, "Statutes for the Enforcement of the Observance of the Sabbath in Poland" [Hebrew], *Zion* 21 (1956), pp. 183–206; H. Soloveitchik, "Religious Law and Change: The Medieval Ashkenazic Example," *AJS Review* 12 (1987), pp. 205–221; Jacob Katz, *The Shabbes Goy*, Y. Lerner, trans. (Philadelphia, 1989); Z. Zohar, *Tradition and Change: Halakhic Responses of Middle Eastern Rabbis to Legal and Technological Change* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1993).

¹⁵ *The Beginning of Hasidism* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 7–8; cf. Yaakov Hisdai, *The Emergence of the Hasidim and Mitnagdim in Light of the Homiletic Literature* [Hebrew], Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University (Jerusalem, 1984).

essentially ahistorical intellectual exercises, “for the sake of Heaven.” Their authors were dedicated to the distillation of halakhic, theological or some other truth and were not making subtle references to or justifications for circumstances in their own times. As Yaakov Elbaum asserted,¹⁶

It is conventional in our age to scrutinize every dispute of the past for political and quasi-political conflicts of interest; this may be no more than projection onto the past... It should be remembered that the feeling of mutual responsibility beats in the hearts of the sages of every generation and the concept that “all Israel are responsible for each other” was the axiom which dictated the nature of their responses.

According to Elbaum when dealing with traditional texts written to further the comprehension of Torah, the attempt at historicization is dubious.

The approach of cultural history can diminish the need for the frequently frustrating search for what distinguishes one source from its intellectual and spiritual predecessors by focusing on the continuity present across sources. To be sure, much of sixteenth century Polish-Jewish culture is virtually identical with earlier German-Jewish, or even talmudic, culture. Not everything is subject to historicist analysis, but that which is traditional and beyond contextualization is also part of the cultural—even if not the social, economic or political—milieu. The *Mappa*—paradoxically written in large measure to preserve oral culture (see below)—anthologized tradition, picking and choosing the authorities and views to be juxtaposed to the *Shulhan Arukh*.¹⁷ While much that is in Isserles’ citations and decisions may not be original, the act of anthologizing implies that from the panoply of Jewish tradition there was a particular cultural canon that was relevant to his society. The components of the past that he repeated had cultural meaning in his present. We are right to analyze as part of Polish-Jewish culture, not only material that obviously originated in Poland, but also earlier material that was repeated in the Polish context.

Another gender-related passage in the *Mappa* can illustrate this point. With respect to women and slaves wearing a *tallit* with attached *tzitzit* Isserles said:¹⁸

In any case, if they want to wear [a *tallit*] and make the blessing over it, [they] may as with all other time-bound positive commandments; however, it appears to be arrogance [*yohara*] and therefore they should not wear *tzitzit*, since [in any case] it is not a personal obligation [*hovat gavra*]; that is, a person is not required to purchase a *tallit* in order to be obligated to wear *tzitzit*.

Isserles’ ruling here is certainly not original. He was essentially echoing a decision voiced around 1400 by Rabbi Jacob Moellin of Mainz, repeated by Rabbi

¹⁶ *Openness and Insularity* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1990), p. 15 and cf. pp. 27–28, 222, 376; and M. Rosman, “Culture in the Book” [Hebrew], *Zion* 56 (1991), 321–344.

¹⁷ Reiner, “Ashkenazi Elite,” p. 97.

¹⁸ *Shulhan Arukh*, Orah Haim 17:2.

Jacob Landau in his late fifteenth century code *Ha-Agur*, published in Italy, and stated again by the Sephardic Joseph Karo in his sixteenth century code, *Bet Yosef*, which preceded the *Shulhan Arukh*.¹⁹ Yet this was not merely a ritual formulaic repetition of a halakhic cliché. It was, rather, a sixteenth century, Polish affirmation of a fundamental Jewish cultural conviction, that conventional gender roles were sacrosanct.

“Arrogance” as employed here can be understood as behavior that the practitioner engages in so as to pretend to a status that does not properly accord to her; similarly to a student who put himself on the same level as his teacher or a religious commoner who assumed certain pietistic affectations without being a full-fledged pietist (medieval-style ascetic, mystic *hasid*)—both of whom are also accused of “arrogance.”²⁰ Women who put on a *tallit* were attempting to arrogate unto themselves male status (and slaves, free man status) in contravention of their proper gender role. The technical permissibility, in halakhic terms, of women wearing a *tallit* was not sanction for violation of one of Jewish culture’s basic premises: that men and women properly filled separate, complementary roles in all spheres, particularly in the area that symbolically represented the other’s ritual.

The fact that Isserles asserted the prohibition against trespass of gender roles by repeating the view of an earlier authority rather than by making a fresh argument did not mean that the construction of gender roles was not a genuine issue for him and his readership. Citing an earlier source made the prohibition more compelling; it certainly did not imply contemporary irrelevance.²¹ Despite technical permissibility, Jewish culture as transmitted in Ashkenaz, had other, perhaps less halakhically well-defined, but cogent reasons for outlawing female *tallit* wearing as a practice that posed a threat to one of the foundation pillars of society. By treating it as Rabbi Moellin had, Isserles could drive this point home. The lack of original views in no way signifies a lack of cultural urgency.

¹⁹ *New Responsa of Rabbi Jacob Molin—Maharil* [Hebrew], Y. Satz, ed. (Jerusalem, 1977), no. 7; *Ha-Agur Ha-Shalem*, M. Herschler, ed. (Jerusalem, 1960), no. 27; *Bet Yosef*, Orah Haim 17:1.

²⁰ See, for example, *Bet Yosef*, Orah Haim 3:1, 24:2, 34:3, 90:24-25, quoting earlier sources.

²¹ Rabbi Isserles’ belief in the importance of maintaining gender boundaries is also implied in his comment concerning women wearing tefillin: [*Shulhan Arukh*, Orah Haim 38:3] “and if women want to be stricter [and put on tefillin even though they are exempt] we prevent them.”

The Influence Model Versus the Polysystem Model of Jewish-Gentile Relations

Given that Jewish culture is continuous with past tradition, a dichotomy is often drawn between “authentic” Jewish culture that grew out of the Jewish past and alien “influences” which impinged on it from other cultures. In the Polish context, to some extent discussions of Jewish culture in Poland have even emphasized its genuine Jewishness by noting how little it was influenced by Polish culture. Certainly in contemporary discourse about assimilation, Polish Jewry in all ages is usually held up as one of the most “Jewish” of Jewries, the least “affected” by its surroundings.

Such a view might derive support from Chone Shmeruk’s study implying that direct contact between Polish and Jewish creativity in the cultural sphere is hard to find even on the popular level. Both Jews and Poles have legendary traditions about a woman named Esterka who was the queen (in the Jewish version) or mistress (in the Polish version) of King Casimir the Great (fourteenth century). Shmeruk’s analysis showed, however, that the two traditions were, perhaps surprisingly, independent of each other.²² The implication is that Jews had no interest in Polish culture, made no effort to become familiar with it, even disdained it as inferior. Conversely, in literary form, Jewish culture was inaccessible to Poles.

More subtly, however, the Jewish Esterka tradition, as well as the Jewish foundation myth about Abraham Prochownik, who was supposedly instrumental in choosing the first king of Poland, and the famous story about the putative Jewish king of Poland for a day, Saul Wahl²³—all denote a profound identification with Poland on the level of meanings and feelings. For a Jew to feel empowered, empowerment had to be legitimate and recognized in the Polish context. For Jews, people who were influential in Polish politics and society—and many more examples could be added to the three already adduced—were cultural heroes. Is such identification to be classified as an “alien” influence on Jewish society, discretely separable from “genuine” Jewish culture? Certainly, as a matter of policy, the Poles made no attempt to Polonize the Jews as they did with other ethnic and religious groups. Jewish adoption of Polish categories of meaning with regard to power seem to be a measure of the extent to which Jewish culture processed the realities of life in Poland and responded to them. Is this response not a legitimate part of Jewish culture? Does it not also demonstrate that Jews were an integral, even if distinctive, element of the Polish polysystem?

Jewish culture in Poland did not only incorporate features resembling specifically Polish culture. There are numerous parallels between Jewish culture and general European culture. For example, regnant pre-Enlightenment political theory held that government was not the representative of the public but its custodian. The oligarchic Jewish communal governing institutions, largely similar in structure and function to municipal bodies that functioned throughout Europe, certainly reflected this principle. In premodern times most people believed that the misfortunes of life were facilitated by demons who were invisibly everywhere. A huge amount of energy was devoted to

²² Chone Shmeruk, *The Esterka Story in Yiddish and Polish Literature* (Jerusalem, 1985).

²³ B. D. Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland* (Philadelphia, 1973), pp. 17–18, 336; G. Karpeles, “A Jewish King in Poland,” *idem, Jewish Literature and Other Essays* (Philadelphia, 1895), pp. 272–292.

preventing their machinations. Jewish books on practical Kabbala, in Poland as elsewhere, make it abundantly clear that Jews were parties to this belief and concomitant behavior. In European economic life, there was a basic prejudice against competition and highly developed local protectionist practices were calculated to stymie it. While Jews tended to circumvent such protectionism in their dealings with non-Jews, within the Jewish community protectionism was the rule. Similarly, the Jewish belief in the absolute necessity of maintaining complementary gender roles if society were to function properly was virtually the same as what obtained in all other contemporary communities.

Once elements like these, whatever their origin, were embedded in Jewish culture, is it appropriate to call them “influences”? Having been long since assimilated into Jewish culture were not these characteristics also part of Polish Jews’ “Jewish heritage” that pre-dated settlement in Poland? If authorities like Isserles made halakhic rulings against gender trespass; if elaborate rituals were developed to ward off demons; if communal by-laws vested oligarchy and legislated economic protectionism for generations; does not this imply that these subtle cultural features that happen to parallel European or Polish culture were regarded as just as authentically Jewish by those who identified with them as any other part of Jewish culture? These things were taken for granted as part of the way Jews did things and, in practice, were as much part of Jewish cultural identity in the early modern period as biblically mandated commandments.

Moreover, the usual impossibility of tracing modes of transmission renders the question of who influenced whom moot. Some of these common cultural components may indeed have originated from Jewish sources (“Judeo-Christian heritage”). By the same token, the Jews did not inherit only defined Jewish traditions, but also broader medieval European and even earlier traditions which they adapted, made their own and put into practice just as their non-Jewish neighbors did. So cultural parallels should not be seen through the prism of influence, but rather that of comparison; as two variations of a common tradition whose roots are obscure. As Elliott Horowitz has suggested, Jewish variations on the common culture can provide a useful tool for historical reflection on the nature of that culture.²⁴ The Jewish case can be a test case.

Even ostensibly traceable practices related to dress, music, diet and popular literature might be better characterized as cultural accretions by default—as the most viable alternatives—rather than isolated influences which by virtue of the power of the hegemonic culture displaced some pre-existing “authentic” Jewish custom. These putatively alien accretions could be rapidly incorporated and deeply rooted in the array of Jewish symbols. Gentile melodies were easily (according to some rabbis, too easily) adopted by cantors as music for Jewish liturgy and subsequently acquired their own venerability.²⁵ Festive-style, central European braided white bread became the

²⁴ See his review of Mark R. Cohen, ed. and trans., *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena’s Life of Judah*, in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 81 (1991), pp. 460–461.

²⁵ N. E. Shulman, *Authority and Community: Polish Jewry in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1986), pp. 80–81. Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe*, (New Haven, 1996), p. 11, called the type of premodern subtle and overt cultural adaptation I have been

definition of *halla* for Jews in Europe and then, interestingly, was referred to as *chala* by Poles.

Jews are a multi-colored strand within the European cultural polysystem. Perhaps the metaphor for Jewish-Gentile cultural interaction should not be that of two magnetic fields coming into contact with each other and influencing or distorting each other; but rather a metaphor of recombinant DNA that *originates* from a widely available repertoire of building blocks, but achieves a unique character by virtue of the combining process. Put differently, it is a kind of intertextuality that defines Jewish culture, not the degree of purity of the origins of the “texts” themselves. Authenticity is dependent not on pedigree but on practice.²⁶

The Place of Gentiles in Jewish Culture

An important aspect of Jewish culture everywhere is attitudes towards non-Jews. Yet, while Gentile attitudes towards Jews have been a frequent subject of study, the corresponding Jewish feelings have not received much scholarly attention. Obviously, in Poland, as elsewhere, Gentiles were everywhere. Moreover, for Jews they were not an invisible Other. Judging from the attention paid to them in Jewish sources they were not only physically but culturally omnipresent. Communal record books and rabbinic sources have myriad references to Gentiles as adversaries, allies and in between: litigation with non-Jews; debts to non-Jews; business transactions and partnerships with non-Jews; the need to maintain felicitous relations with Gentiles and not to arouse their ire; lobbying and cooperating with non-Jewish authorities; non-Jewish courts; non-Jewish testimony; episodes of anti-Jewish actions and persecution; the proper response to non-Jewish religion; casual relations with Gentile neighbors, acquaintances and even friends.

It has been observed that in Polish culture there was a range of attitudes towards the Jews across sectors of society and often a duality when comparing theory with practice.²⁷ Examination of Jewish sources shows a similarly complex situation in Jewish culture relative to Christians in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

While the theoretical Gentile was typically a monolithic, threatening character, real Gentiles came from a variety of social categories and were encountered in numerous contexts. In some they were feared and hated, in others they were dealt with matter-of-factly, learned from, even liked and trusted. The Jewish establishment in Poland believed that the safest policy was to limit Jewish-Gentile intercourse to the instrumentally necessary minimum. In contrast, many ambitious individuals aspired to close relations with powerful Gentiles, which, as we have seen, were an important source of pride, power and accomplishment. Some Polish Jews who had left Poland

discussing, “internal acculturation”; see also R. Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 114–116.

²⁶ See Bruner, pp. 116, 118 on the importance of practices as opposed to contemplation in negotiating the formation of Self.

²⁷ Jacob Goldberg, “Poles and Jews in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Rejection or Acceptance,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 22 (1974), pp. 248–282.

expressed scorn for the country and its people. There are signs that some early Hasidic leaders contemplated moderating the demonic image assigned to Gentiles by Jewish folklore and mandating relations with them based on ethical considerations.²⁸

Such determinations as these, however, merely scratch the surface of this subject. Systematic research can expand the catalogue of Jewish attitudes towards Gentiles and show their development and nuances. It would raise and treat many new questions; some examples: What were the typologies and stereotypes that Jews used to simplify thinking about non-Jews? To what extent were Jewish attitudes towards non-Jews typical of minority attitudes concerning the hegemonic group? What were the sources of the attitudes? What canonical Jewish texts were enlisted as expression of Jewish attitudes and how were they re-interpreted to do so? How did different attitudes dovetail or conflict? How were attitudes concretized in both ritual and unprescribed behavior? What role did attitudes towards Gentiles play in the formulation of rabbinic law and communal policies? What role did they play in the inner dynamics of the Jewish community?²⁹

The Transition From Oral to Written Culture

In an influential article on the development of modern fundamentalist Orthodoxy in Judaism, Haym Soloveitchik has posited that traditional Ashkenazic Judaism was perpetuated in large part via an oral culture. This was lost, however, due to assimilation in America and then replaced by a book culture that enshrines unprecedented legalism and ritual punctiliousness. Classically, Jewish culture, anchored in texts, was transmitted in a fashion that was

mimetic, imbibed from parents and friends, and patterned on conduct regularly observed in home and street, synagogue and school... the classic Ashkenazic position for centuries...saw the practice of the people as an expression of halakhic truth... on frequent occasions the written word was reread in light of traditional behavior.³⁰

As implied here, the dialectic between orality and literacy is very old. The early modern period represents a major stage in its development. The foundational nature of oral components in early Polish-Jewish culture can be traced in many sources.

²⁸ Weinryb, *Jews of Poland*, pp. 165–176; Fram, *Ideals Face Reality*, pp. 28–37; G. D. Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town* (Baltimore, 1992), pp. 40–45; M. J. Rosman, “A Minority Views the Majority: Jewish Attitudes Towards the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Interaction with Poles,” *From Shtetl to Socialism: Studies from Polin*, A. Polonsky, ed. (London, 1993), pp. 39–49.

²⁹ An important recent study that does consider many of these questions is: I. J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 2000).

³⁰ Soloveitchik published this article in two versions: “Migration, Acculturation and the New Role of Texts in the Haredi World,” in M. Marty and R. S. Appleby, eds., *Accounting for Fundamentalism* (Chicago, 1994), pp. 197–235, and “Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” *Tradition* 28 (1994), pp. 64–130; the citation is from the first version, pp. 197–198.

For example, one of the most common genres of Jewish text in Poland was the *pinkas* (minute book). Every community maintained a *pinkas* that was the official record of communal life, recording such items as: by-laws, *kahal* decisions, court rulings, real estate transactions, election results, budgets, expenses, revenues, taxation, credit transactions and other communal business and events. *Pinkasim* offer direct evidence of how life was lived, of the problems and issues facing people in these communities, and of the perceptions and opinions of at least the leadership of the community. They also lend insight into the processes by which decisions were made and solutions were adopted.³¹

The *pinkas* was under the control of the political elite, the elders of the *kahal*. Kept under lock and key, it was actually seen only by the scribe, the *kahal* official who told him what to write and a few other authorized persons. Its contents were communicated through reading aloud at *kahal* meetings and selected public announcements (occasionally posted in written form) in the synagogue. Most people knew what the *pinkas* mandated by hearing it, or about it—not by reading it. It engendered a local tradition known orally and through intermediaries, not by ready reference to the authoritative text.

A manuscript entitled *Sefer Ha-Heshek* is a book of *segulot*, i.e. a guide for *ba'alei shem* (shamans or faith healers), instructing them in the praxis of practical Kabbala, specifying what medical and mystical measures to apply to various human problems of the body, heart and soul. Written by Hillel Ba'al Shem circa 1741, it indicates what was on people's minds and how they tried to make sense of life and change it when they couldn't. It is a classic example of the role of Kabbala in everyday life (see below).³²

Hillel Ba'al Shem asserted that he wrote his manuscript as a protest against a series of four *segula* books that were published in the first half of the eighteenth century in Zolkiew and against the general popularization of practical Kabbala which those four books both symbolized and promoted. Hillel insisted that the popularization of mystical practices through printing bastardized them by making them available to people who did not really understand what they were doing. Inexpert kabbalistic manipulation based on half-baked learning gained from popular guides was at best ineffectual and at worst dangerous. It gave all kabbalistic practice a bad name.³³ Kabbala should remain the domain of learned experts who would communicate with the masses—orally—on a need-to-know basis. His book was not to be printed so that it would be widely available. It was to serve as a handbook for an expert, professional *ba'al shem* who would only get to see it if the manuscript's possessor deemed him fit.

Sefer Ha-Heshek offers a glimpse of the process of transition from orality to literacy. Hillel was fighting a rearguard action against a trend ascendant in Jewish

³¹ There are extensive excerpts from Polish *pinkasim* and some analysis of them in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* (PAAJR) 19 (1950). The entire volume, edited by B. D. Weinryb, is entitled *Texts and Studies in the Communal History of Polish Jewry*.

³² The manuscript was discovered by Dr. Yohanan Petrovsky in the Jewish collection of the Vernadsky Library in Kiev; its call number is Or 178.

³³ *Sefer Ha-Heshek*, p. 119b and passim.

culture since the appearance of printing; the popularization of knowledge through books. Traditionally, formal study was accomplished by oral instruction from a teacher based on a manuscript that students might copy, adding their teacher's glosses (*hagahot*). The educational text was the manuscript plus the teacher's oral interpretation. Without the access to this "text," represented by a teacher, students would find it difficult to learn.³⁴ Informal study was also oral, with parents and others instructing children at home by reciting quotations, citing various halakhic rules relevant to the daily tasks of life, telling stories and demonstrating proper behavior. As Soloveitchik noted, the transmission of culture was "mimetic."

Printing changed this paradigm. Books, both holy and secular, now came into every home, offering a much broader range of material that could be drawn upon for the edification of family members. In the formal educational setting printed books gave students a degree of independence from their teachers. The study text was no longer the teacher's oral interpretation of the manuscript, but a printed, immutable book. The study curriculum could also be broadened to include the works of scholars whose focus was other than that of the teachers of a given area. Thus, for example, in Poland students could learn not only Ashkenazic texts, but Sephardic ones as well; not only *halakha*, but philosophy, homiletics, biblical exegesis, and more.³⁵

Paradoxically, Isserles' *Mappa*—which exists in printed form only—was also a confirmation of the weakening of oral tradition as printed books took hold. In his introduction Isserles noted that his primary reason for writing this work was to counter the power of the printed *Shulhan Arukh* which would be such that students would accept its pronouncements "without controversy and thereby contravene the customs of the[se] lands." The Rama was moved to reduce to writing Ashkenazic oral tradition, largely based on oral teaching, in order to save it from oblivion in the face of Karo's code, which being in an accessible, printed form carried a presumption of authority.³⁶

Sefer Ha-Heshek and the *Mappa* demonstrate that the old oral culture and its promulgators were on the defensive. The advent of printing and the consequent change in attitudes towards knowledge and its "rightful" possession exercised their influence among Polish Jews. Each of these works, in its own way, is an indicator of the demand for printed books that could serve as the sources for Jewish culture. Book culture could empower broad sectors of the population, who now might know the *halakha* as well as practical mystical rites by themselves without dependence on elitist experts (consider, for example, the spate of halakhic and prayer books printed for

³⁴ Reiner, "Ashkenazi Elite," pp. 85–93.

³⁵ S. Boruchson, *Books and Readers: The Reading Interests of Italian Jews at the Close of the Renaissance* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan, 1993), p. 105, demonstrated that in Mantua in 1595 the average number of books to be found in Jewish households was approximately fifty. As to the exposure to a broad variety of Jewish intellectual trends and schools that printing facilitated see Elbaum, *Openness and Insularity*, pp. 24, 63–64, 179–180 and *passim*; and E. Reiner, "The Attitude of Ashkenazi Society to the New Science in the Sixteenth Century," *Science in Context* 10 (1997), pp. 589–603.

³⁶ Isserles' introduction is included in the Cracow 1578–80 edition and the 1974 facsimile thereof; see note 13 above.

women beginning in this period).³⁷ Because it was written and permanent, this culture would be more precise but less flexible and adaptable. Once the rules were printed in easily accessible form, life could be more readily measured against them. Mitigation of their rigidity through personal rabbinic intervention required a courageous assumption of responsibility, a towering authoritativeness or both. Over time there was a tendency to strictly enforce the written demands and to articulate them ever more pedantically. It appears that Soloveitchik was actually describing the culmination of a process that had begun centuries earlier.

Norms Versus Praxis

The problematics of using laws and other decretive works as historical sources are well rehearsed. There is no guarantee that behavior mandated by authorities was actually implemented. Prohibitions are typically more indicative of the existence of the forbidden behavior than of its prevention. Historians who base themselves on normative books are more likely to be describing what elites wanted life to be like than what it was in reality. For pre-nineteenth century Jewish history in general, however, there is a particular dependence on prescriptive sources. The relative lack of Jewish archival documents as a result of the vicissitudes of the history we are studying, forces Jewish historians to consider over and over again the books of rabbinic instruction.

Most Hebrew sources pre-dating the Haskala are prescriptive works. There are no easy means for determining the extent to which the strictures of the rabbinic codes, the decisions of *kehalim* registered in *pinkasim*, or the directives of *ba'alei shem* preserved in *segula* books were actually observed. Virtually every case requires careful textual analysis of the way in which the source presents its demands and diligent search after collateral or comparative material that can shed light on the lives the authors of these texts intended to shape.

In this process of analyzing and searching, we can be guided by the example Jacob Katz set in the 1950s in writing his classic study *Tradition and Crisis*. As he explained in the Preface,³⁸

My description is derived from the various primary sources of the period: communal and provincial *pinkasim*, ethical and polemical works, and the like. I have drawn on the halakhic literature of the period—responsa, codes and commentaries—more than is common among historians. Moreover, I have not

³⁷ D. Roskies, "Yiddish Popular Literature and the Female Reader," *Journal of Popular Culture* 13 (1979), pp. 852–858; A. Segal, "Yiddish Works on Women's Commandments in the Sixteenth Century," in: *Studies in Yiddish Literature and Folklore* (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 37–59; C. Shmeruk, *Yiddish Literature in Poland* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 11–74, 147–164; C. Turniansky, "On Old Yiddish Biblical Epics," *International Folklore Review* 8 (1991), pp. 26–33; I. Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, Vol. 7 (Cinn.-N.Y., 1975). On women's prayers see C. Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs* (Boston, 1998).

³⁸ See Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, p. xiii.

restricted myself to noting historical realia incidentally recorded in these works. I have focused on the laws themselves, which, after all, formed an obligatory religious norm for the Jews of that era. For me these laws stand out as evidence of the life and spirit of the time, and bear witness to the many theoretical and practical conflicts that affected both the individual and the community. I have drawn upon the religious training of my youth in order not to treat as dead letters that which was, for our subjects, a philosophy of life.

What Katz called—in the 1950s—evidence of “the spirit of the time,” “theoretical conflicts” and “a philosophy of life,” is today considered to be the stuff of cultural history. Normative sources do not represent sets of arbitrary demands originating with the authors of these books. They do present a considered exposition of how members of society should express that which all hold to be meaningful. They contain guidelines for responding to life in a way consistent with the cultural meanings held in consensus. They are not only codes of law or codes of conduct but codes of meaning. As such they offer profound insights into culture, even if they do not necessarily reflect how people always behaved.

Recalling, for example, the use of the category of “arrogance” (*yohara*) to forbid various practices (as Isserles did with regard to women wearing a *tallit* [above]), we can surmise that the society that was expected to respect such rulings—regardless of whether or not every individual always did so—placed a premium on people knowing their place. Conformity was valued and promoted. It was important that people play the roles that tradition and society had delineated for them.

The Genderization of Society

The highly genderized nature of traditional Jewish society and culture is a commonplace. Yet, as perusal of any standard survey discloses, Jewish men’s lives have been explicated in ramified detail while Jewish women are mostly described in brief, stereotypical fashion. It has taken work such as Chava Weissler’s on the Tehines prayers; or Renee Levine-Melammed’s on Converso women and Converso religion to demonstrate that Jewish women had a complex cultural identity and a contoured religious role which paralleled and contrasted with those of men.³⁹

The new slant on Jewish history we have gained from these and other feminist scholars is added to the basic lesson provided by Joan W. Scott in how to use gender as a tool of historical analysis.⁴⁰ We are now equipped to inspect sources with a view

³⁹ Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*; R. Levine-Melammed, *Heretics or Daughters of Israel* (Oxford, 1999).

⁴⁰ See her *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), esp. pp. 28–50. Jewish analogues are Paula E. Hyman, “Feminist Studies and Modern Jewish History,” in L. Davidson and S. Tenenbaum, eds., *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies* (New Haven, 1994), pp. 120–139; Shulamit Magnus, “Out of the Ghetto: Integrating the Study of Jewish Women into the Study of ‘The Jews,’” *Judaism* 39 (1990), pp. 28–36; Myra Shoub, “Jewish Women’s History: Development of a Critical Methodology,” *Conservative Judaism* 35 (1982), pp. 33–46. On the development of Jewish gender

towards analyzing how they depict differential gender roles. For example, from prayer collections we see that men's prayer was rigidly standardized, while women's prayer was more occasional and topical. From halakhic codes it is evident that men's ritual life was paced almost entirely by the calendar; women's more by biology and contingency. Educational texts show men's religious education to be designed to train for public ritual participation; women's for theological fundamentals and personal and home practices.

We can also understand how these roles interlocked to undergird the structure of meaning and practice that supported Jewish culture. The elaborate Sabbath and holiday rituals were well served by the combination of women's "freedom" to serve as facilitators and men's "obligation" to serve as performers, which in turn reinforced the facilitator/performer dichotomy in the family, social, and political realms. Children's initiation into the culture was premised on the mother having a flexible ritual schedule and the father, a more regularized one. When Isserles protested against women's acceptance of the daily obligations to put on *tzitzit* and *tefillin*, he was demarcating gender roles in a way that fostered the facilitator/performer dichotomy. However, increased female presence in the synagogue and Isserles' leniency in this connection, as noted earlier, indicate that gender roles could evolve.

There were also spheres where the facilitator/performer dichotomy was undermined. In the marketplace there were women who were on their own or were real partners with their husbands. Their "performance" was essential to ensuring the economic health of their families and of society as a whole.⁴¹ *Sefer Ha-Heshek's* numerous rituals connected to fertility, pregnancy and birth indicate a domain of culture where women were the main performers and men the observers.

There was no more pervasive factor than gender in determining the structure of Jewish culture. Defining its parameters will go a long way towards clarifying the nature and dynamics of that culture.

The Place of Kabbala

Since Gershom Scholem, one of the important vectors in research on Jewish culture in the early modern period has been the elucidation of the significance of Kabbala in forging the normative Jewish ethos. In the nineteenth century, Maskilim and Reformers had charged that one of the main problems with Judaism as it emerged from the Middle Ages was the ascendancy in it of magical, superstition-inducing, practical Kabbala, which occluded much of the rational religious substance of Jewish culture. Traditionalist practitioners of Judaism and apologist scholars of *Wissenschaft* reacted to this charge by suppressing the contributions of Kabbala to Jewish life

roles see the controversial study by Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley, 1997).

⁴¹ On the economic role of women in Polish-Jewish society in the early modern period see M. Rosman, "To Be a Jewish Woman in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth" [Hebrew], in: *The Broken Chain: Polish Jewry Through the Ages*, Vol. 2 (Mercaz Shazar, Jerusalem), forthcoming; for medieval Ashkenaz, see Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious*, pp. 256–265.

throughout history. Scholem burst upon the scene in the 1920s asserting that it is impossible to understand Judaism without Kabbala. With regard to the early modern period he posited that the Kabbalistically inspired reactions to the Spanish Expulsion reverberated throughout the Jewish world and were somehow involved in all of the important developments of Jewish history from 1492 till at least the rise of Reform.⁴²

To be sure, Scholem's thesis that the popularization of Lurianic Kabbala laid the groundwork for the spread of Sabbatianism has been stood on its head in recent years. Scholars have demonstrated convincingly that Lurianic Kabbala was not widely known before Shabbetai Zvi and that it is likely that the impetus for its spread among the masses was supplied by the Sabbatians. Moreover, Scholem's general view of the power of Kabbala to affect history has been criticized as reductionist.⁴³

Be that as it may, the prevalence of Kabbalistic practices and beliefs in everyday Judaism, in part thanks to the availability of popular Kabbala books as alluded to earlier, from at least the late seventeenth century on is now conventionally recognized. Why—as opposed to how—this occurred awaits full explanation and there still is no systematic exposition of the popular religion of the period. Perhaps most important, the implications of Kabbala's entry into the lives of normal people have barely been explored. With the exception of researching the roots of Hasidism which drew much from popularized Kabbala, no one has asked: Which basic concepts, relations and institutions changed? For example, was genderization affected? Was the educational process transformed? Did people sin less?

The contrast between the “rational” and kabbalistic sides of Jewish culture is evident in comparing the *Mappa* and *Sefer Ha-Heshek*. Isserles, writing in the second half of the sixteenth century, rarely cited kabbalistic sources in his halakhic work. His hints at the *Zohar* serve only to reinforce the impression that this was a closed book to his readership and that he had no intention of basing his rulings on it. Compare this to the eighteenth-century *Sefer Ha-Heshek* which is overflowing with demons, incantations, inscriptions, magical pictures and formulas, and prescriptions for behavior intended to lead to beneficial contact with the supernatural sphere.

The *Mappa* reflects a view of life where God is in Heaven and all is right with the world. What the Jew is called upon to do is but to follow the tradition of previous

⁴² David Biale, *Kabbalah and Counter-History* (2nd ed. Cambridge, 1982), esp. chapters “Mysticism” and “Messianism”; Joseph Dan, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History* (New York, 1987), esp. the first chapter.

⁴³ Scholem's thesis was stated concisely in the first chapter of his *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton, 1973); for critiques, see: M. Idel, “One from a Town, Two from a Clan: The Diffusion of Lurianic Kabbala and Sabbatianism, a Re-examination,” *Jewish History* 7 (1993), pp. 79–104; Z. Gries, *Conduct Literature* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1989), Introduction; J. Barnai, *Sabbateanism—Social Perspectives* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 2000), pp. 10, 15–20. See also, Elbaum, *Openness and Insularity*, pp. 356–376; Tom Hubka, “The Shaar Ha-Shamayim Synagogue in Gwozdziec: The Influence of the *Zohar* on Art and Architecture” [Hebrew], in H. Pedaya, ed., *Ha-Mytos Ba-Yahadut* [= *Eshel Beer Sheva* 4 (1996)]; Eric Zimmer, *Society and its Customs: Studies in the Metamorphosis of Jewish Customs* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1996), according to the index, s.v. “Kabbala.”

generations in the service of the Lord in order to qualify for an assured ultimate reward. *Sefer Ha-Heshek* assumes a world fraught with danger and excitement. One can never anticipate nor be sure how to respond to the obstacles that life (or demons) erects. The Jew—and particularly the Jewish woman—must live with psychological tension with regard to the overriding question of whether she has sufficiently provided for the supernatural security of the members of her family.

From this differential approach to the basic human condition follow two different goals for religious life. Isserles' rules were the means to fulfill God's will and thus the individual and collective Jewish destinies. By following his halakhic decisions a person could hope to attain personal redemption and contribute the maximum to the ultimate Redemption. The goal of *Sefer Ha-Heshek* is something else: protection from harm at the hands of agents human or supernatural. The reward was simple survival. This certainly might explain part of the Kabbala's popular appeal. Whether the objectives of the *Mappa* and *Sefer Ha-Heshek* were complementary and whether one took precedence are questions that deserve study.

Conclusion

Wissenschaft des Judentums concentrated on the products of the Jewish spirit. Nationalist-inspired scholarship created a Jewish political history. The Jewish historiography created in the decades after the Shoah and the establishment of Israel has turned in significant measure to social history. The postmodern age that has been so occupied with the deconstruction of symbols and meanings that were previously self-evident would seem to have prepared the ground for a new synthesis of cultural meaning. We can return to the study of the spirit; not what it produced, but what it was.

Has Jewish history entered a postmodern phase? How can Jewish history utilize the methodologies of other disciplines to accomplish its task? All these are questions that Jewish historians need to think about if their work is to be taken seriously by mainstream historians and intellectuals, or indeed by educated Jews interested in understanding their own cultural and historical past.Â His basic claim is that it is possible to incorporate, judiciously, postmodern innovations into historical scholarship that is still based on documentary research and critical analysis. The resulting endeavor might be termed 'a reformed positivism'. Rosman presents a concentrated, coherent, cogent argument as to what considerations must be brought to bear on the writing of Jewish history today.