



## The Increasing Reliance on Ritual Handbooks in Pre-Print Era Ashkenaz

RACHEL ZOHN MINCER

*Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, USA*

*E-mail: [rzohn.mincer@gmail.com](mailto:rzohn.mincer@gmail.com)*

**Abstract** Handbooks devoted to a single area of ritual practice figure prominently among the works produced by German Jews from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth. These handbooks include *minhagim* books intended primarily as liturgical guides for cantors and manuals for other types of communal functionaries, such as scribes and ritual slaughterers. Historians typically associate *minhagim* books with the post-Black Death period and the desire to provide guidance during a time of decline for German Jewry. Similarly, the flourishing of halakhic manuals is considered a fourteenth-century phenomenon, a result of the rabbinate's professionalization. However, these explanations are insufficient since both genres emerged earlier. This article links the production of ritual handbooks to two trends: geographic mobility and a more text-oriented culture. Between the thirteenth century and the fifteenth, major changes in German Jewish settlement patterns disrupted the transmission of ritual practice and led to a need for practical guides. The proliferation of ritual handbooks was also related to the increase in Ashkenazic society—as in medieval Europe generally—in the production of written texts. These texts included liturgical genres and practical halakhic works, some of which served as sources for the handbooks. However, the handbooks tend to be more accessible than their predecessors and to include more practical details. The proliferation of late medieval ritual handbooks demonstrates that changes typically associated with the advent of print, including a growing reliance on written sources for practical information and a move toward the standardization of ritual practice, began to emerge in earlier centuries.

**Keywords** Ashkenaz · Late medieval · *Minhagim* book · Communal functionary · Book history

R. Moses Mintz, a leading German halakhic authority, wrote a set of detailed guidelines for cantors in the mid-fifteenth century. According to Mintz, he was responding to a request from members of his Bamberg community who may have been displeased with the behavior of their prayer leader.<sup>1</sup> The passage below is excerpted from those guidelines:

---

<sup>1</sup>See Yonatan Sheraga Domb, ed., *Resp. Rabbenu Moshe Mintz*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1991), 2:389–97. See also Mordechai Breuer, “Sheliaḥ ha-Zibbur be-Ashkenaz shel Yemei ha-Benayim,” *Dukhan* 9 (1972): 13–25, 14–15; compare Eric Zimmer, *Gaḥaltan shel Ḥakhamim: Peraqim be-Toldot ha-Rabbanut be-Germanyah be-Me’ot ha-16 ve-ha-17* (Beersheba, 1999), 16; and Mordechai Breuer and Yacov Guggenheim, “Die jüdische Gemeinde, Gesellschaft und Kultur,” in *Germania Judaica*, vol. 3, bk. 3, ed. Arye Maimon, Mordechai Breuer, and Yacov Guggenheim (Tübingen, 2003), 2079–2138, 2085.

And when he [the cantor] stands up to pray, he should turn his attention away from every thought and concern, directing his gaze downward so that he does not look at anyone. Instead, he should place his hands on his heart under his outer garment, clasping his left hand with his right, like a servant before his master who stands with fear and awe. He should only move his hands from one another if necessary—for example, to turn the pages, to arrange his prayer shawl and the like. He should not occupy himself with anything else, as there are some cantors whose hands are occupied with foolish things, such as adjusting the candles while they are praying or examining the custom book [*minhagim*] or other things, and this should not be done.<sup>2</sup>

The basic and detailed nature of these prescriptions suggests that some cantors in fifteenth-century Germany did not live up to the standards of piety desired by their communities. Although in an earlier period in Ashkenaz rabbinic scholars often served as community cantors,<sup>3</sup> by the fifteenth century, particularly in larger communities, prayer leaders tended to be salaried functionaries who did not necessarily have the same level of devotion and liturgical expertise as their earlier counterparts.<sup>4</sup> Mintz's prescriptions imply that the Bamberg cantor required instruction not only in proper cantorial comportment but also in the details of synagogue practice, as indicated by his need to examine the *minhagim* (lit. "the customs"), a reference to liturgical *minhagim* books. These concise guides to customary liturgical practice were among the most common genres produced by German Jews from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth. The Bamberg cantor's apparent need to consult a book of this type points to another development in late medieval Ashkenazic society—the increasing reliance on handbooks as sources of ritual guidance.

In addition to liturgical guides, German Jews produced an array of other types of handbooks that focus on specific areas of halakhic practice—for example, circumcision and ritual slaughter. I refer to these works as *halakhic manuals* or *halakhic handbooks*, although, like *minhagim* books, they prescribe details of ritual practice often shaped by local or regional custom. Like liturgical *minhagim* books, many of these handbooks were meant to serve primarily as professional guides for communal functionaries. This ar-

<sup>2</sup>Domb, ed., *Resp. Rabbeinu Moshe Mintz*, 2:391.

<sup>3</sup>Ephraim Kanarfogel, "The Appointment of *Hazzanim* in Medieval Ashkenaz: Communal Policy and Individual Religious Prerogatives," in *Spiritual Authority: Struggles over Cultural Power in Jewish Thought*, ed. Howard Kreisel, Boaz Huss, and Uri Ehrlich (Beersheba, 2009), 5–31, 5. For additional sources on this subject, see *ibid.*, 5–6 nn. 2–3.

<sup>4</sup>Breuer and Guggenheim, "Die jüdische Gemeinde," 2085; and Breuer, "Sheliaḥ ha-Ẓibbur be-Ashkenaz," 13–15. See also Kanarfogel, "The Appointment of *Hazzanim* in Medieval Ashkenaz," 6–7.

ticle focuses on *minhagim* books and halakhic manuals of this type, whose intended readers included cantors, circumcisers, scribes, and ritual slaughterers.<sup>5</sup> However, not all ritual handbooks produced in late medieval Ashkenaz were aimed at such narrow, specialized audiences. Although some *minhagim* books were designed principally as liturgical aids for prayer leaders,<sup>6</sup> others cover a wide variety of practices and thus functioned as general ritual guides for a more varied group of educated readers.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, many halakhic manuals were not intended specifically for communal functionaries.<sup>8</sup> These include, for example, handbooks on the laws of *issur ve-heter*, which mainly concern prohibited and permitted foods.<sup>9</sup>

Scholars have associated halakhic manuals and *minhagim* books primarily with the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, although both genres emerged earlier. Israel Ta-Shma links the production of “professional halakhic literature,” which he believes began to flourish in the fourteenth century, with the contemporaneous emergence of a professional Ashkenazic rabbinate.<sup>10</sup> However, halakhic handbooks—on ritual slaughter and circumcision, for instance—were already being produced in the twelfth and thirteenth cen-

<sup>5</sup>Ta-Shma has written extensively about this genre. See Israel Ta-Shma, “Qavvim le-Ofyah shel Sifrut ha-Halakhah be-Ashkenaz be-Me’ot ha-13–14,” *‘Aleī Sefer* 4 (1977): 20–41, and *Halakhah, Minhag u-Mezi’ut be-Ashkenaz: 1100–1350* (Jerusalem, 1996), 94–111 (a later version of the *‘Aleī Sefer* article).

<sup>6</sup>Even many of the works I am referring to as *liturgical minhagim books* were probably not intended for prayer leaders only. As I explain below, although instructions for synagogue services constitute a major component of all liturgical *minhagim* books, many also cover non-liturgical as well as home-based practices.

<sup>7</sup>The term *minhagim book* has also been used to refer to late medieval German works in which the students of prominent rabbis recorded their customs, teachings, and personal habits. These rabbi-centered works, which tend to be loosely organized, cover a wide range of practices, liturgical and nonliturgical, relating, e.g., to daily life, holiday observance, and life cycles. Among the works they include are *Sefer Tashbez*, composed by a student of R. Meir of Rothenburg in the late thirteenth century or the early fourteenth, and *Leqet Yosher*, written by a student of the fifteenth-century Austrian scholar R. Israel Isserlein.

<sup>8</sup>For more on medieval Ashkenazic halakhic handbooks and the types of subjects they cover, including, e.g., divorce and the laws related to menstruation (*niddah*), see Edward Fram, *My Dear Daughter: Rabbi Benjamin Slonik and the Education of Jewish Women in Sixteenth-Century Poland* (Cincinnati, OH, 2007), 3–5, esp. nn. 5–8; and Breuer and Guggenheim, “Die jüdische Gemeinde,” 2117–18, esp. nn. 240–45. In addition to writing works for other readers, rabbis sometimes composed handbooks for their own personal use. Fram, *My Dear Daughter*, 4 n. 8.

<sup>9</sup>See Simcha Emanuel, *Shivrei Luhot: Sefarim Avudim shel Ba’alei ha-Tosafot* (Jerusalem, 2006), 237–38, esp. n. 72. Emanuel distinguishes handbooks on *issur ve-heter*, which were intended for a variety of educated readers, from both professional guides for communal functionaries and more scholarly halakhic monographs aimed at rabbinic scholars.

<sup>10</sup>Ta-Shma, “Qavvim le-Ofyah shel Sifrut ha-Halakhah,” 20–22, and *Halakhah, Minhag u-Mezi’ut*, 94–96.

turies.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the tendency in more recent scholarship is to view the shift toward a professionalized rabbinate as a very gradual process that unfolded over the course of the late fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, scholars typically view *minhagim* books as products of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—the so-called post-Black Death period—and tend to attribute their popularity to the desire to preserve customs and provide guidance during a time of upheaval and decline for Jews in Germany.<sup>13</sup> But this explanation is insufficient, particularly since the earliest German *minhagim* books—some of which were identified relatively recently—are from the thirteenth century.<sup>14</sup> The production not only of *minhagim* books but also of halakhic manuals is certainly related to the deterioration in conditions for German Jewry that began in the late thirteenth century. However, the broader phenomenon to consider is the increase in the number of Jewish settlements and the gradual spread of Jews across the Germanic lands, a trend that emerged earlier and was not initially a result of the decline in German Jewish status.

<sup>11</sup>On handbooks about ritual slaughter from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see, e.g., Yedidya Alter Dinari, *Ḥakhmei Ashkenaz be-Shilhei Yemei ha-Benayim* (Jerusalem, 1984), 293. See also the discussion below of an early thirteenth-century handbook on circumcision.

<sup>12</sup>See the summary of the historiography on this subject as well as the author's own views in Israel Yuval, *Ḥakhamim be-Doram: Ha-Manhigut ha-Ruḥanit shel Yehudei Germanyah be-Shilhei Yemei ha-Benayim* (Jerusalem, 1989), 11–20, 322–49, esp. 349. See also Zimmer, *Gaḥaltan shel Ḥakhamim*, 14–19.

<sup>13</sup>See, e.g., Mordechai Breuer, “Ha-Yeshivah ha-Ashkenazit be-Shilhei Yemei ha-Benayim” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1967), 69–71, and *Oholei Torah: Ha-Yeshivah, Tavnitah ve-Toldotehah* (Jerusalem, 2003), 152–53; and Jeffrey Woolf, “The Authority of Custom in the Responsa of R. Joseph Colon (Maharik),” *Diné Israel* 19 (1997–98): 43–73, 48–53. See also the historiographic survey in my “Liturgical Minhagim Books: The Increasing Reliance on Written Texts in Late Medieval Ashkenaz” (Ph.D. diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 2012), 9–13.

<sup>14</sup>Liturgical *minhagim* books from this period include, e.g., (1) a work by the thirteenth-century scholar R. Isaac of Düren (see Israel Elfenbein, ed., *Minhagim Yeshanim mi-Dura* [New York, 1948]); (2) several short collections of liturgical customs from the thirteenth century (see Daniel Goldschmidt, “Liḳṭei Minhagim me-ha-Me’ah ha-13,” in *Mehqerei Tefillah u-Fiyyut* [Jerusalem, 1979], 61–65); (3) a thirteenth-century book with the liturgical customs of Worms and Mainz (“Minhagei Vormayza u-Magenza de-Vei Rashi ve-Rabbotav u-Minhagei Ashkenaz shel ha-Roqeah,” in *Genuzot*, vol. 2, ed. Moshe Herschler [Jerusalem, 1985], 11–28) (for more on this work, particularly the version published by Herschler, see Emanuel, *Shivrei Luḥot*, 223 n. 21, 229 n. 43); (4) two books with the customs of Rothenburg that apparently were written shortly after the lifetime of R. Meir of Rothenburg (see Emanuel, *Shivrei Luḥot*, 228–37), i.e., the late thirteenth century or the early fourteenth (a version of one of those books can be found in Shlomo Spitzer, “Qizur Minhagei Maharam mi-Rothenburg,” *Asufot* 2 [1988]: 83–90); and (5) a short collection of liturgical customs from thirteenth-century Erfurt (Zvi Avneri, “Minhagei Erfurt,” *Sinai* 46, nos. 2–3 [November–December 1959]: 264–68).

This article will locate liturgical *minhagim* books and halakhic manuals within their broader historical and literary contexts in order to shed light on the factors that contributed to the increase in their production during the late medieval period. Here, *late medieval* will usually include the thirteenth century as well as the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries since the phenomena I am discussing span that period. I will focus primarily on two trends: (1) the geographic mobility of German Jewry, not only in the post–Black Death era, but also during the two centuries preceding it; and (2) the increase in the production of written texts in medieval Ashkenaz, which paralleled a similar increase in medieval Europe as a whole. As a result of both these developments, there was by the late medieval period—even before the advent of print—a growing reliance on written works as sources of practical ritual guidance.

Liturgical *minhagim* books, intended for use by cantors in Bamberg and other Ashkenazic communities, supply holiday liturgical guidance organized according to the order of the annual cycle.<sup>15</sup> Some books also cover the weekday, Sabbath, and/or new moon liturgy or include customs related to life-cycle events, such as circumcision and marriage. Large portions of all liturgical *minhagim* books consist of instructions for synagogue services. However, many books also provide guidance for home-based liturgical rituals, such as the Passover Seder and *kiddush*,<sup>16</sup> as well as for nonliturgical holiday practices, for instance, the laws related to kindling the Hanukkah lights and baking unleavened bread for Passover. Thus, in addition to providing instruction for prayer leaders, some liturgical *minhagim* books include information about holiday practices that would be useful to a less specialized reading audience. Nevertheless, even in these books, the primary focus is on the liturgy, particularly for the synagogue.

This discussion of liturgical *minhagim* books is based in part on my in-depth study of this subgenre,<sup>17</sup> which focused on one set of five highly interrelated liturgical books, all produced in eastern areas of the Germanic

---

<sup>15</sup>In addition to liturgical *minhagim* books, the medieval German *minhagim* literature also includes rabbi-centered *minhagim* books (see n. 7 above). *Sefer Maharil*, written by Zalman of St. Goar, a student of the early fifteenth-century German rabbinic authority R. Jacob Molin (Maharil), combines aspects of both *minhagim* book subgenres. It covers liturgical and holiday practices, arranged in an annual cycle structure. However, it also provides guidance in many other areas of ritual practice and records many of Maharil's teachings and customs. In a sense, *Sefer Maharil* resembles an aggregation of halakhic handbooks (among them a version of R. Jacob Weil's guide to ritual slaughter, discussed in this article) appended to a liturgical *minhagim* book of sorts. My comments on *Sefer Maharil* are based on the version found in Shlomo Spitzer, ed., *Sefer Maharil*, rev. ed. (1989; reprint, Jerusalem, 2005).

<sup>16</sup>*Kiddush* is the blessing of sanctification over wine recited on the Sabbath and festivals.

<sup>17</sup>See my "Liturgical Minhagim Books."

lands. These include two of the earliest German liturgical *minhagim* books, the books associated with R. Yehezqiyahu of Magdeburg and R. Abraham Hildik, both composed in the first half or the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>18</sup> The latest book I examined, the *minhagim* of Ayzik Tyrnau,<sup>19</sup> is from the first half of the fifteenth century. Tyrnau, who studied in Vienna,<sup>20</sup> portrays his book as a guide to the customs of Hungary, Styria, Austria, and Moravia.<sup>21</sup>

Owing to their brevity, practical orientation, and organized structure, liturgical *minhagim* books are generally user-friendly sources of ritual guidance, although the books I examined vary somewhat with respect to their accessibility. Some of them—for example, the *minhagim* of R. Yehezqiyahu of Magdeburg—include occasional, relatively brief halakhic justifications of their prescriptions that assume both the ability to follow complex arguments and an acquaintance with talmudic sources. On the other hand, the thirteenth-

<sup>18</sup>I also examined the *minhagim* of Abraham Klausner, of which there are two relatively recent critical editions: Yonah Yosef Disin, ed., *Sefer Minhagim le-Rabbenu Avraham Klausner* (Jerusalem, 1978); and Shlomo Spitzer, ed., *Sefer ha-Minhagim le-Rabbenu Avraham Klausner* (hereafter *Klausner's Minhagim*), 2nd ed. (Jerusalem, 2006), 1–137. *Klausner's Minhagim* also includes copies of three of the other *minhagim* books I examined: (1) a critical edition of the *minhagim* of Abraham Hildik (Shlomo Spitzer, ed., *Minhagei Rabbenu Avraham Hildik* [hereafter *Hildik's Minhagim*], in *Klausner's Minhagim*, 193–253 [previously published in *Qovez 'al Yad*, n.s., no. 9 (1979): 153–215]); (2) the text of a thirteenth-century manuscript of the Yehezqiyahu *minhagim* book (MS Oxford 1150 [Opp. 672], fols. 11r–22r, Bodleian Library [*Klausner's Minhagim*, 139–90, col. 1]); and (3) the text of a manuscript from 1305 of the *minhagim* of Hayyim Palṭi'el, a late thirteenth- or very early fourteenth-century work (MS NLI 8°1282, fols. 38–60, National Library of Israel [*Klausner's Minhagim*, 139–90, col. 2; previously published as “Minhagei Rabbi Hayyim Palṭi'el,” in Goldschmidt, *Mehqerei Tefillah u-Fiyuṭ*, 38–60]). Note that there are occasional errors in the transcribed versions of the two manuscript texts in Spitzer's edition.

<sup>19</sup>For a critical edition of Tyrnau's *minhagim* book, see Shlomo Spitzer, ed., *Sefer ha-Minhagim le-Rabbenu Ayzik Tyrnau* (hereafter *Tyrnau's Minhagim*), 2nd ed. (Jerusalem, 2000), 1–164.

<sup>20</sup>Tyrnau's introduction is the richest source of information about his life and the dating of his book. He was probably born in the late fourteenth century since he characterizes R. Abraham Klausner of Vienna, who died ca. 1408, as “my teacher of long standing” (*rabbi muvhaq*). Tyrnau's statement that “people of faith, Torah and [good] deeds in Austria have perished and disappeared” and his use of the phrase “the martyr of blessed memory” in reference to R. Aaron of Krems, another teacher, strongly suggest that he wrote his book after the “Wiener Gesera” (persecution of Vienna), the major wave of persecutions that culminated in the expulsion of the Jews from many areas in Austria in 1421. See *Tyrnau's Minhagim*, 1; and Spitzer, introduction to *Tyrnau's Minhagim*, 9–19, 13–14.

<sup>21</sup>*Tyrnau's Minhagim*, 3. Austria is mentioned in only one of the two extant manuscripts of Tyrnau's book (MS Jewish Theological Seminary Rab. 1147, fol. 170v, New York; cf. MS Israel Museum 180/053, fol. 14v, Jerusalem). However, in both manuscripts, Austria figures prominently in Tyrnau's introductory comments.

century *minhagim* of Abraham Ḥildik and Ayzik Tyrnau's fifteenth-century work incorporate virtually no halakhic argumentation, although they do include scattered references to basic rabbinic concepts and halakhic terms. Comprehension of the vast majority of their contents requires only knowledge of Hebrew and a general familiarity with liturgical practice. Moreover, the liturgical instructions in both are particularly detailed and unambiguous. Alternative customs and opinions are rarely given. Thus, these two *minhagim* books could be used not only by rabbinic scholars but also by people with more limited exposure to talmudic texts. In fact, in the introduction to his book, Tyrnau explicitly notes his desire to provide guidance "even to people who are not scholars [*talmidei ḥakhamim*]." <sup>22</sup> In late medieval Ashkenaz, people in this category might include communal functionaries, who were not necessarily talmudic experts, as well as educated householders and scholars who, though having some familiarity with halakhic texts, focused primarily on other areas of Jewish study. <sup>23</sup>

My observations about halakhic manuals are based largely on an examination of three books composed in Germany from the thirteenth century through the fifteenth. <sup>24</sup> These books relate to three different areas of religious practice—circumcision, *tefillin* (phylacteries), and ritual slaughter. Although late medieval Ashkenazic works on ritual slaughter and other topics related to the production of kosher meat are relatively abundant, I have been able to identify only a few handbooks for either scribes or *mohalim* (ritual circumcisers, sing. *mohel*). The number of extant works on circumcision in particular appears to be quite limited. <sup>25</sup> Thus, rather than being representative members

---

<sup>22</sup>Tyrnau's *Minhagim*, 1.

<sup>23</sup>On the types of people in this category, see, e.g., Yuval, *Ḥakhamim be-Doram*, 280–81; Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Ben Yeshivot Ba'alei ha-Tosafot le-Vatei Midrashot Aherim be-Ashkenaz Bimei ha-Benayim," in *Yeshivot u-Vatei Midrashot*, ed. Immanuel Etkes (Jerusalem, 2006), 85–108, 99–106, esp. 103–6; and Judah Galinsky, "The Significance of Form: R. Moses of Coucy's Reading Audience and His Sefer ha-Mizvot," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 35, no. 2 (2011): 293–321, 311–15, and "Rabbis, Readers and the Paris Book Trade: Understanding French Halakhic Literature in the Thirteenth Century," in *Entangled Histories*, ed. Elisheva Baumgarten, Ruth Mazo Karras, and Katelyn Mesler (Philadelphia, 2017), 73–92, 78–79.

<sup>24</sup>In addition, the present analysis is based on the printed editions of these books, as cited below.

<sup>25</sup>These conclusions are based on (1) the types of works mentioned by Ta-Shma, Fram, Breuer and Guggenheim (see nn. 5, 8 above); (2) the printed books listed in Menahem Kasher and Ya'aqov Dov Mandelboim, *Sarei ha-Elef: Reshimat ha-Sefarim she-bi-Defus u-Meḥabrehem*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, [1978]); and Simcha Emanuel, *Hosafot ve-Hashlamot le-Sefer Sarei ha-Elef* (Bet El, 2002); and (3) searches for relevant manuscripts in the online catalog of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the National Library of Israel. On the relative abundance of late medieval handbooks that deal with topics related to the production of kosher meat, see also Emanuel, *Shivrei Luhot*, 237–40.



of a larger group of similar professional works, the manuals on circumcision and *tefillin* making may be atypical compositions.<sup>26</sup>

Like the liturgical *minhagim* books, these halakhic handbooks vary with respect to the talmudic expertise they assume, but all of them have an extremely practical orientation. Even when passages from rabbinic sources or differing opinions are included, they provide clear-cut instruction and focus much more on practical detail than on argumentation. In general, understanding their prescriptions requires familiarity with only one area of halakhah and the concepts and technical terms associated with it. Thus, like liturgical *minhagim* books, they could serve as practical guides for educated people who were not necessarily Talmud scholars.

A handbook on circumcision from early thirteenth-century Worms<sup>27</sup> may have been the first professional manual produced in Ashkenaz.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, the author, a *mohel* known as R. Gershom ha-Gozer (lit. “Gershom the Cutter”),<sup>29</sup> was interested in providing comprehensive guidance to his fellow *mohalim* since his book covers almost every conceivable practical issue related to circumcision. In addition to detailed instructions for how to perform the circumcision and provide proper medical care for the infant afterward, he discusses circumcision on Sabbaths, holidays and fast days, children who are born with certain physical conditions, restrictions on who can be a *mohel*, customs for the circumcision ceremony and celebration, and circumcision-related liturgical issues.<sup>30</sup> In his discussions of halakhic questions—for ex-

---

<sup>26</sup>Ta-Shma, who focuses on both these works, seems to suggest that they—and particularly *Barukh she-Amar*, the handbook on *tefillin* making—are typical of the professional literature as a whole (see, e.g., Ta-Shma, *Halakhah, Minhag u-Meẓi’ut*, 106–7), although, at the end of his article on this subject (Ta-Shma, “Qavvim le-Ofyah shel Sifrut ha-Halakhah,” 41), he does note that most of the fourteenth-century works in this genre deal with ritual slaughter and the production of kosher meat.

<sup>27</sup>My discussion of this handbook is based on the printed edition: Jacob Glassberg, ed., *Sefer Zikhron Brit la-Rishonim* (Berlin, 1892; reprint, Jerusalem, 1971). This edition includes two different copies, the second of which is a highly adapted version found in *Sefer ha-Asufot* (see *ibid.*, 107–43). Unless otherwise specified, my comments relate to the first copy (*ibid.*, 1–106). See the discussion of the different manuscript versions of the handbook in Simcha Emanuel, “Mi-Guf Rishon le-Guf Shlishi: Perek be-Tarbut ha-Ketivah be-Ashkenaz Bimei ha-Benayim,” *Tarbiz* 81 (2013): 431–57, 436–40.

<sup>28</sup>This is the earliest professional guide known to Ta-Shma. See Ta-Shma, “Qavvim le-Ofyah shel Sifrut ha-Halakhah,” 22. On the book’s early thirteenth-century dating, see Emanuel, “Mi-Guf Rishon le-Guf Shlishi,” 453–57.

<sup>29</sup>My claim about the book’s authorship is based on Simcha Emanuel’s recent research, which convincingly undermines the long-standing view, established by Jacob Glassberg and accepted by Ta-Shma and others, that the original work was written by R. Ya’aqov ha-Gozer, who was thought to be R. Gershom’s father. See Emanuel, “Mi-Guf Rishon le-Guf Shlishi,” 436–40.

<sup>30</sup>Some of this type of material also appears in the *minhagim* books I examined. In fact, the *minhagim* books associated with Abraham Hildik and Abraham Klausner include entire sec-



ample, how and under what circumstances circumcisions should be performed on the Sabbath—R. Gershom does sometimes quote relatively long passages from talmudic and geonic sources that include argumentation and differing opinions. However, even in these cases, he generally provides the reader with unambiguous rulings.<sup>31</sup> His guide also supplies an abundance of midrashic material, potential subject matter for the sermons that were customarily given at the postcircumcision festivities.<sup>32</sup> This material, found mainly at the beginning and end of the book, contains scattered references to actual sermons of this type.<sup>33</sup>

*Tiqqun Tefillin* is a detailed technical-halakhic guide to the art of *tefillin* making, written in the late thirteenth century or the early fourteenth by R. Abraham b. Moses of Sinsheim, a student of R. Meir of Rothenburg.<sup>34</sup> Among the subjects it discusses are technical rules related to the preparation of the parchment, the proper formation of the letters, and the sewing of the *tefillin* boxes. To a greater extent than R. Gershom's circumcision guide, *Tiqqun Tefillin* is a practical instruction book. R. Abraham includes virtually no halakhic argumentation and only occasionally provides brief reasons, generally of a midrashic type, for his prescriptions. He rarely cites sources,<sup>35</sup> although he does periodically include general references to the Talmud of the type "the book said" (*amar ha-sefer*).<sup>36</sup> Evidently, his primary concern was to instruct his fellow scribes, whose practices he often criticizes, occasionally referring to them as evildoers (*po'alei aven*).<sup>37</sup> In fact, he links the composition of his work to widespread ignorance about the laws of *tefillin*

---

tions devoted to circumcision-related laws and customs. See *Hildik's Minhagim*, 217–18; and *Klausner's Minhagim*, 133–37. Note that only three of the seven extant Klausner manuscripts include this material: MS Oxford 2188 (Mich. 117), fols. 87v–89r, Bodleian Library; MS Hamburg 201 (Cod. hebr. 249), fols. 27r–28v, Hamburg State and University Library; and MS Oxford 377 (Mich. 311), fols. 86v–87r, Bodleian Library.

<sup>31</sup>See, e.g., Glassberg, ed., *Sefer Zikhron Brit la-Rishonim*, 22–25, 30–31.

<sup>32</sup>The custom of giving sermons is noted in *ibid.*, 68.

<sup>33</sup>See, e.g., *ibid.*, 62, 101. On the sermons in the circumcision guide and their significance, see Jacob Elbaum, "Shalosh Derashot Ashkenaziyyot Qedumot mi-Kitvei Yad Bet ha-Sefarim," *Kiryat Sefer* 48, no. 2 (1973): 340–48.

<sup>34</sup>My comments about *Tiqqun Tefillin* and the other scribal handbooks I discuss are based on the versions found in Menaḥem Mendel Meshi-Zahav, ed., *Qovez Sifrei Stam* (Jerusalem, 1970). For *Tiqqun Tefillin*, see *ibid.*, 19–194. On R. Abraham's life, see *ibid.*, 19–25. According to Meshi-Zahav, R. Abraham's book, particularly his introduction, is the only known source of information about him. See Meshi-Zahav, introduction to *Qovez Sifrei Stam*, 7–29, 9–10.

<sup>35</sup>In this respect, *Tiqqun Tefillin* is similar to the thirteenth-century *minhagim* of Abraham Hildik, which also cites few rabbinic sources of any kind.

<sup>36</sup>See, e.g., *Tiqqun Tefillin*, 53, 62, 71, 94.

<sup>37</sup>See, e.g., *ibid.*, 54, 182.

production.<sup>38</sup> Sometimes he denounces scribal practices in particular areas in Germany—for example, in Thuringia and in the cities of Nuremburg and Erfurt.<sup>39</sup> Apparently, he had the authority to declare invalid *tefillin* produced by scribes in the latter city.

In the late fourteenth century, about a half century after R. Abraham of Sinsheim wrote *Tiqqun Tefillin*, R. Samson b. Eliezer emended the work and appended glosses to it. R. Samson, a scribe who received a copy of *Tiqqun Tefillin* from his teacher, claims that over time it had become corrupted. A native of Saxony who moved to Prague in his childhood, he was also known as Barukh she-Amar, a moniker he attributes to his regular and particularly pleasant recitation of the *Barukh she-Amar* prayer as an orphaned youth.<sup>40</sup> All the extant manuscripts of *Tiqqun Tefillin* include R. Samson's glosses, and the two components together—the original text and the glosses—became known as *Barukh she-Amar*.<sup>41</sup> In his glosses, R. Samson tries to compensate for *Tiqqun Tefillin*'s omission of sources by identifying medieval halakhic works that support its prescriptions. In addition, he clarifies the original book's instructions, occasionally disagreeing with them, and includes relevant excerpts from the medieval works that he cites. Although many of his glosses focus on the textual and halakhic underpinnings of *Tiqqun Tefillin*'s rules, his goals are also practical. Like R. Abraham, R. Samson is highly critical of his fellow scribes, at times also characterizing them as evildoers<sup>42</sup> or declaring their *tefillin* invalid.<sup>43</sup> In some cases, he claims that scribes had not received authentic traditions.<sup>44</sup> He therefore believed that an emended and glossed version of *Tiqqun Tefillin* could provide much-needed guidance.<sup>45</sup>

R. Yomtov Lipmann Mühlhausen, the author of the polemical work *Sefer ha-Nizahon*, also produced a guide to the scribal arts. His guide was some-

---

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 19–25.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 33 (Thuringia), 109 (Nuremburg, Erfurt), 113 (Erfurt).

<sup>40</sup>*Barukh she-Amar*, in *Qovez Sifrei Stam*, 15–194, 15–18. As with R. Abraham of Sinsheim, virtually nothing is known about R. Samson b. Eliezer aside from the biographical information he includes in his book. See Meshi-Zahav, introduction to *Qovez Sifrei Stam*, 12–13. See also Israel Ta-Shma, “‘Inyanei Erez Yisra’el,” *Shalem* 1 (1974): 81–95, 94–95.

<sup>41</sup>Meshi-Zahav, introduction to *Qovez Sifrei Stam*, 7–8, 12. Meshi-Zahav notes that copies of *Barukh she-Amar* often included a third component—R. Yomtov Lipmann Mühlhausen's scribal handbook. See the discussion of this work below.

<sup>42</sup>See, e.g., *Barukh she-Amar*, 16, 115–16 (gloss 68).

<sup>43</sup>See, e.g., *ibid.*, 88 (gloss 46, where R. Samson discusses his involvement in a ban imposed on a particular scribe, someone who, in his words, had “caused the public to sin [*hiḥti et ha-rabbim*] for over thirty years”), 142 (gloss 88), 151 (gloss 94).

<sup>44</sup>See, e.g., *ibid.*, 42 (gloss 18), 75–76 (gloss 42).

<sup>45</sup>See R. Samson's discussion of his motivations for producing a new version of *Tiqqun Tefillin* in *ibid.*, 15–18.

times copied together with the two components of *Barukh she-Amar*<sup>46</sup> and eventually came to be associated with them.<sup>47</sup> Mühlhausen, who was active in Prague in the late fourteenth century and the early fifteenth, lists R. Samson b. Eliezer, the glossator of *Tiqqun Tefillin*, among the scholars who instructed him in the scribal arts.<sup>48</sup> In his *Alfa Beta*, Mühlhausen discusses only the proper formation of the letters. Although the book includes halakhic arguments and kabbalistic reasons for the shapes of the individual letters, the first part of the work focuses solely on practical instruction so that, according to Mühlhausen, “every person who understands Hebrew” could learn from it.<sup>49</sup> Clearly, he wanted to instruct less educated scribes as well as those with halakhic and kabbalistic expertise.

In the fifteenth century, R. Jacob Weil, a leading German rabbinic authority,<sup>50</sup> composed a handbook on ritual slaughter and inspection that became known as *Sheḥitot u-Vediqot*.<sup>51</sup> It provides a succinct summary of the major laws of ritual slaughter as well as instructions for the inspection of the dead animal’s lungs to check for possible abnormalities that might render the animal nonkosher. Earlier German rabbis, including R. Eliezer b. Nathan (Ra’avan), a twelfth-century halakhic authority, and R. Mordekhai b. Hillel, the late thirteenth-century author of *Sefer Mordekhai*, had also produced works about ritual slaughter.<sup>52</sup> These two scholars wrote their guides in rhymed form, presumably as a mnemonic device to aid their readers.<sup>53</sup> Apparently, user-friendliness was also a priority for Weil, whose concise, practical guide would be accessible to anyone familiar with basic talmudic language and the technical terms related to ritual slaughter. *Sheḥitot u-Vediqot*, which was written by a halakhic authority rather than a professional ritual slaughterer,<sup>54</sup> is less comprehensive than either R. Gershom ha-Gozer’s cir-

<sup>46</sup>See the description of different versions of *Barukh she-Amar* (some of which include copies of Mühlhausen’s work) in Meshi-Zahav, introduction to *Qoveṣ Sifrei Stam*, 21–25.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 7–8, 16–17.

<sup>48</sup>*Sefer Alfa Beta*, in *Qoveṣ Sifrei Stam*, 197–285, 198.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>50</sup>For more on Weil, see Bernard Rosensweig, *Ashkenazic Jewry in Transition* (Waterloo, ON, 1975), 11–18.

<sup>51</sup>My comments about this handbook are based on the version found in *Sefer Sheḥitot u-Vediqot shel Mahari Vayl: ‘Im ha-Haggahot u-Ve’urim shel Shelomoh Lurya* (Betar Illit, [2005/2006?]), 3–82. Another version of the work, adapted by the author of *Sefer Maharil*, can be found in Spitzer, *Sefer Maharil*, 570–84.

<sup>52</sup>Dinari, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz be-Shilhei Yemei ha-Benayim*, 293. For more on earlier Ashkenazic works about ritual slaughter and/or inspection, see also Emanuel, *Shivrei Luḥot*, 237–50.

<sup>53</sup>On these and other Ashkenazic halakhic monographs written in rhymed form, see Elchanan Reiner, “Ben Ashkenaz le-Yerushalayim: Hakhmim Ashkenaziyyim be-Erez Yisra’el le-aḥar ‘ha-Mavet ha-Shaḥot,’” *Shalem* 4 (1984): 27–62, 36–37, esp. n. 32.

<sup>54</sup>Weil was involved, however, in the supervision of ritual slaughterers and inspectors. Rosensweig, *Ashkenazic Jewry in Transition*, 95.

cumcision guide or *Tiqqun Tefillin* and contains fewer technical craft-related details. However, it too focuses on practical, clear-cut instruction. Weil includes only a few scattered references to talmudic sources and medieval halakhic authorities and only occasionally notes differences in rabbinic opinion. His instruction to consult with a scholar (*hakham*) in one case<sup>55</sup> implies that he did not assume that his readers were halakhic experts. Weil's decision to discuss only the inspection of the animal's lungs indicates that he had limited goals for his intended audience. Referring to Weil's book, the sixteenth-century Polish rabbinic authority R. Moses Isserles justified the custom, which may have become prevalent by Weil's time, of requiring the ritual inspector to check only for abnormalities in the lungs. He argued that, unlike other types of defects, these are relatively common. In cases of potential problems with other parts of the animal, Isserles—and apparently Weil as well—assumed that the inspector would seek the guidance of a scholar.<sup>56</sup>

*Minhagim* books and halakhic manuals such as those described above were produced during a period of significant geographic mobility and displacement for German Jewry. According to one estimate, on the eve of the First Crusade, there were only about a dozen places of Jewish residence in Germany, half of which were in the Rhineland, the center of Jewish religious and intellectual life in this period. But, over the course of the twelfth century, and particularly after 1150, the number of Jewish settlements doubled, most of the growth occurring in the central Rhineland. The rate of settlement expansion accelerated rapidly during the thirteenth century as Jews began to establish communities in many new areas. A peak was reached by the mid-fourteenth century, when Jews were living in over one thousand localities scattered throughout the Germanic lands.<sup>57</sup>

The expansion of German Jewish settlement was fueled by the availability of economic opportunities for Jews in new places, a result of Germany's increasing urbanization and the growth of commerce and a money-based economy. The growing use of credit led to opportunities in moneylending,<sup>58</sup> an economic activity in which Jews became increasingly engaged during

---

<sup>55</sup>*Sefer Shehitot u-Vediqot*, 62. This instruction does not appear in the version of Weil's work found in *Sefer Maharil*. However, that version does include a discussion of the issue at hand that refers to Maharil's ruling when he was consulted in a particular case. See Spitzer, *Sefer Maharil*, 581–82.

<sup>56</sup>Dinari, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz be-Shilhei Yemei ha-Benayim*, 292–93.

<sup>57</sup>Michael Toch, "The Formation of a Diaspora: The Settlement of Jews in the Medieval German Reich," *Aschkenas* 7, no. 1 (1997): 55–78, 55–61 (maps), 65–68, 71–74, and "Jewish Migrations to, within and from Medieval Germany," in *Peasants and Jews in Medieval Germany* (Aldershot, 2003), 639–52, 641.

<sup>58</sup>Toch, "The Formation of a Diaspora," 71–75, 77.

the thirteenth century. Rulers, recognizing the benefits of the economic services Jews provided, granted them favorable conditions, both in cities and in smaller settlements.<sup>59</sup> However, by the late thirteenth century, waves of anti-Jewish violence, primarily in southern regions of Germany, emerged as another significant factor contributing to the explosive growth in the number of Jewish settlements.<sup>60</sup> From 1300 to 1348, over five hundred new Jewish communities were established, many more than in any previous half century.<sup>61</sup> But “the pull of economic opportunity” must be weighed against “the push of violence and discrimination” in accounting for the settlement expansion of this period.<sup>62</sup>

The outbreak of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century, together with the persecutions that accompanied it, dealt a devastating blow to German Jewry, affecting a much wider swath of Jewish settlements than any of the earlier waves of violence.<sup>63</sup> During the next century and a half, German Jewish life became more unsettled than ever, as intolerance of Jews intensified and Jewish legal status and economic significance declined. Although in the second half of the fourteenth century Jews returned to many of their former places of residence and also moved to new areas, they became a largely transient population. Loss of permanent settlement rights was a major factor in the intensified forced mobility of this period. Residence permits tended to be granted only on a short-term and individual basis, and expulsions became more frequent, especially during the fifteenth century. German Jewish settlement began to undergo a process of ruralization as Jews were forced to move into small towns and villages.<sup>64</sup> This trend of intensified internal migration was accompanied by a rise in emigration, particularly to northern Italy and Poland.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup>Mordechai Breuer, “Prologue: The Jewish Middle Ages,” in *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, ed. Michael A. Meyer, vol. 1, *Tradition and Enlightenment: 1600–1780*, trans. William Templer (New York, 1996), 7–77, 30–31; Jörg R. Müller, “*Erez Gezerah*—‘Land of Persecution’: Pogroms against the Jews in the Regnum Teutonicum from c. 1280 to 1350,” trans. Frankie Sue Kann in *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages: Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Christopher Cluse (Turnhout, 2004), 245–58, 247.

<sup>60</sup>Toch, “The Formation of a Diaspora,” 68–69. For more on these waves of anti-Jewish violence, see Müller, “*Erez Gezerah*,” 248–56.

<sup>61</sup>Toch, “The Formation of a Diaspora,” 67 (chart).

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>63</sup>Müller, “*Erez Gezerah*,” 256–57; Toch, “The Formation of a Diaspora,” 70.

<sup>64</sup>Breuer, “Prologue: The Jewish Middle Ages,” 45–53; Toch, “Jewish Migrations,” 643–44, and “The Formation of a Diaspora,” 70–71, 76–77.

<sup>65</sup>Toch, “Jewish Migrations,” 645–47. In a recent conversation, Yacov Guggenheim brought to my attention evidence supporting another possible Jewish migratory trend in medieval Central Europe, the immigration into Germany of Jews from Slavic lands, a subject I am continuing to explore. See, e.g., Alexander Beider, *A Dictionary of Ashkenazic Given Names: Their Origins, Structure, Pronunciation, and Migrations* (Bergenfield, NJ, 2001), 167–84.

These demographic changes—the explosive settlement growth during the thirteenth century and the early fourteenth and the communal instability of the post–Black Death era—undermined established patterns in Jewish communal life. During this period, it undoubtedly became more difficult for communal functionaries to acquire the skills they needed through traditional means of oral and mimetic transmission. Furthermore, in communities that may have included Jews with different local or regional traditions, standards needed to be established.<sup>66</sup> Thus, a need arose for written guides to ritual practice.<sup>67</sup> Given the more numerous communities of this period and the eventual decline in population, both during the Black Death years and owing to emigration, it is likely that individuals whose rabbinic learning was limited sometimes had to serve as communal leaders and functionaries.<sup>68</sup> In small isolated communities where it may have been difficult to consult with rabbinic authorities, accessible written guides would be particularly useful.

The production of the particular handbooks examined here is consistent with these changes in German Jewish settlement patterns. R. Gershom ha-Gozer composed his book in thirteenth-century Worms during a period of economic growth in the Rhineland and nearby areas that was accompanied by the establishment of many new Jewish communities.<sup>69</sup> In parallel with patterns of German urbanization, Jewish settlement during the thirteenth century was expanding in many areas, including in the northeastern region of Germany,<sup>70</sup> where the *minhagim* books associated with Yehezqiyahu of Magdeburg and Abraham Hildik were written. The condemnation by R. Abraham of Sinsheim and R. Samson b. Eliezer of many of their fellow scribes' practices may be related to possible contact with unfamiliar traditions, a result not only of their own travels<sup>71</sup> but also, perhaps, of the intermingling of Jews from different areas at a time of heightened geographic mobility. Since both scribes

<sup>66</sup>See Mordechai Breuer, "Ha-Semikhah ha-Ashkenazit," *Zion* 33 (1968): 15–46, 22.

<sup>67</sup>A similar, though much larger-scale, shift from the oral and mimetic transmission of religious practice to a reliance on written texts that occurred in Orthodox circles in the wake of the upheavals in Jewish life during the twentieth century has been identified. See Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," *Tradition* 28, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 64–130.

<sup>68</sup>Apparently, some served in several different communal capacities. The anonymous late fourteenth-century German Jewish author of a short autobiographical account writes that he served as cantor, ritual slaughterer, and hostel keeper in the city of Koblenz. See Israel Yuval, "Otobiografyah Ashkenazit me-ha-Me'ah ha-Arba-'Esreh," *Tarbiz* 55, no. 4 (1986): 541–66, 565. R. Abraham of Sinsheim, the author of *Tiqqun Tefillin* who refers to himself as a *tefillin* maker, also says: "In my youth I was called Abraham cantor from Heifurt [possibly Erfurt] by the French." *Tiqqun Tefillin*, 19.

<sup>69</sup>See Toch, "The Formation of a Diaspora," 72.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 58–60 (maps), 72–73.

<sup>71</sup>For references to their travels, see, e.g., *Tiqqun Tefillin*, 109, 113; and *Barukh she-Amar*, 16, 87–88.

lived during periods of major anti-Jewish violence,<sup>72</sup> they may also have felt a particular urgency to ensure proper transmission of the professional and halakhic details associated with the production of *tefillin*. Ayzik Tyrnau, who wrote his *minhagim* book after the expulsion of the Jews from many areas of Austria in 1421, explicitly portrays his book's practical orientation and user-friendly style as a response to the paucity of scholars in that country.<sup>73</sup> The accessible style of Jacob Weil's handbook on ritual slaughter is undoubtedly also related to the need for guidance in the scattered and often small Jewish communities of fifteenth-century Germany, where rabbinic scholars may not always have been available.<sup>74</sup>

Though associated with the geographic dispersion of German Jewry, the composition of *minhagim* books and halakhic manuals should also be viewed within the context of the increasing production of written works in medieval Ashkenaz.<sup>75</sup> This trend emerged in the second half of the eleventh century and was further stimulated by Rashi's late eleventh-century commentaries, which were followed by a proliferation of Tosafist compositions, including works of practical halakhah.<sup>76</sup> A variety of liturgical genres, including prayer texts and guides, were also produced.<sup>77</sup> By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, some rabbinic authorities were bemoaning the decreasing dependence of students on their teachers that resulted from the much greater availability of written texts.<sup>78</sup> According to one scholar:<sup>79</sup> "That which we learn, 'A student should not make halakhic decisions unless he is at a distance of three

<sup>72</sup>Like so many other students of R. Meir of Rothenburg, R. Abraham may have been affected by the major outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence in the late thirteenth century and the early fourteenth. See Breuer, "Ha-Semikhah ha-Ashkenazit," 18. It is possible that R. Samson and his family were forced to leave Saxony because of a Black Death-related persecution. See Ta-Shma, "'Inyanei Erez Yisra'el,'" 94.

<sup>73</sup>Tyrnau's *Minhagim*, 1. On the dating of Tyrnau's book, see n. 20 above.

<sup>74</sup>Apparently, some ritual slaughterers in fifteenth-century Germany were not well educated. In one of his responsa, Maharil, Weil's teacher, notes that someone had decided to write a Yiddish guide to ritual slaughter because "some ignoramuses who are in the villages [*yishuvim*]" could not understand "even the laws of ritual slaughter from a Hebrew book." Jacob Molin, *She'elot u-Teshuvot Maharil ha-Ḥadashot*, ed. Yitzchok Satz (Jerusalem, 1977), 93. See also Dinari, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz be-Shilhei Yemei ha-Benayim*, 291–92.

<sup>75</sup>In this discussion of literary developments during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, I am using *Ashkenaz* in its broader sense for that period to refer to northern France as well as Germany.

<sup>76</sup>Emanuel, *Shivrei Luhot*, 1–12.

<sup>77</sup>I discuss some of these genres below.

<sup>78</sup>Emanuel, *Shivrei Luhot*, 3–4; Breuer, *Oholei Torah*, 374–78.

<sup>79</sup>On the identity of this scholar, see Emanuel, *Shivrei Luhot*, 4, esp. n. 7; and Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Rabbinic Authority and the Right to Open an Academy in Medieval Ashkenaz," *Michael* 12 (1991): 233–50, 241–48.



parasangs [Persian miles] from him [his master],’ applied in the time of the *tanna’im* and *amora’im* [the period of the Mishnah and the Talmud]. . . . But now the legal decisions [*pesaqim*] and rulings [*hora’ot*] are written, and all can look in the books of legal decisions and rule [so that] the master does not have a crown as much as in those days if he is not actually in his presence.”<sup>80</sup> Similarly, the thirteenth-century scholars R. Moses and R. Samuel of Evreux lamented the diminished status of teachers, who had been replaced by “the Talmud, commentaries, innovative teachings [*hiddushin*], and written works.”<sup>81</sup> The composition of handbooks for communal functionaries also reflects a shift toward a greater dependence on texts for the transmission of traditions.

Among this abundance and variety of written works were several genres that have connections to the *minhagim* books and halakhic manuals of late medieval Ashkenaz. Scholarly *maḥzorim*, which functioned as liturgical-halakhic guides, were among the earliest written sources of Ashkenazic liturgical texts and practices. The first spate of *maḥzorim*, produced in France during the late eleventh century and the early twelfth, is associated with the school of Rashi. Scholarly *maḥzorim* were the literary antecedents of liturgical *minhagim* books. Like the *minhagim* books, they contain an annual cycle structure (*maḥzor* means “cycle”) within which are incorporated laws and customs related to the holidays and the liturgy. Although some *maḥzorim* include full or partial liturgical texts, others, like the *minhagim* books, simply outline the order of the prayers.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, some of the *minhagim* books I examined—particularly the thirteenth-century works<sup>83</sup>—appear to have drawn directly on *Maḥzor Vitry*, a widely disseminated *maḥzor* pro-

<sup>80</sup>Yitshak Ya’aqov Har-Shoshanim-Rosenberg, ed., *Ha-Semaq mi-Zurikh*, 3 vols., 2nd ed. (Jerusalem, 1981), 1:275.

<sup>81</sup>See Emanuel, *Shivrei Luḥot*, 3–4.

<sup>82</sup>Avraham Grossman, *Hakhmei Zarfah ha-Rishonim* (Jerusalem, 1995), 401–3, 580–81. See also Aryeh Goldshmidt, introduction to *Maḥzor Vitry* (3 vols.), ed. Aryeh Goldshmidt (Jerusalem, 2003), 1:19–56, 19–21. As Goldshmidt points out, some medieval *maḥzorim* also cover other areas of practical halakhah, such as circumcision, ritual slaughter, and the laws of prohibited foods. Thus, in a sense, these *maḥzorim* have connections to some of the halakhic manuals as well. Grossman (*Hakhmei Zarfah ha-Rishonim*, 236–39, 580–81) also discusses the production by Rashi’s students of halakhic monographs, which he says are similar in many respects to the *maḥzorim*. He believes that both genres were intended to provide practical ritual guidance to the small, scattered Jewish communities of France in the late eleventh century and the twelfth. *Minhagim* books and halakhic manuals—later counterparts of sorts of the genres Grossman is describing—seem to have served a similar function in late medieval Germany.

<sup>83</sup>These include the *minhagim* books associated with Yeḥezqiyahu of Magdeburg and Abraham Hildik.

duced by the school of Rashi.<sup>84</sup> There are close parallels, both in wording and in content, between *Maḥzor Vitry* and these *minhagim* books.<sup>85</sup>

Despite their close ties to *Maḥzor Vitry*, liturgical *minhagim* books differ from it in several fundamental respects. *Maḥzor Vitry*, though a practical guide, includes relatively long halakhic discussions, differing rabbinic views, and liturgical commentaries. Although *minhagim* books vary with respect to the amount and types of nonpractical material they contain, all of them are more manual-like than *Maḥzor Vitry*. They are more concise and focus more exclusively on providing instruction. Furthermore, the more accessible *minhagim* books would have been more useful to readers who were not halakhic or liturgical experts.

The production of liturgical *minhagim* books is also related to the increasing availability of prayer books, especially after the mid-thirteenth century. Although prayer books remained relatively scarce until the invention of the printing press, they did become more widely available during the late medieval period, particularly for use by community cantors. Previously, even prayer leaders often had to rely on memory rather than on written texts.<sup>86</sup> As attested in *Sefer Mordekhai* and several other medieval Ashkenazic sources, prayer books were used more commonly by both cantors and congregants on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when the liturgy is long and unfamiliar, than on other occasions.<sup>87</sup> It is not surprising that the growing availability of written liturgical texts was contemporaneous with an increase in the composition of liturgical guides.

By the thirteenth century, Tosafist scholars were producing a variety of practical halakhic works and compilations,<sup>88</sup> some of which served as important sources for both the *minhagim* books and the halakhic manuals, particularly those from the late fourteenth century and the fifteenth. R. Samson b. Eliezer, the late fourteenth-century glossator of *Tiqqun Tefillin*, quotes

<sup>84</sup>On the widespread dissemination of *Maḥzor Vitry*, see Goldshmidt, introduction to *Maḥzor Vitry*, 1:21–22; and Israel Ta-Shma, *Ha-Tefillah ha-Ashkenazit ha-Qedumah: Peraqim be-Ofyah uve-Toldotehah* (Jerusalem, 2003), 17–18.

<sup>85</sup>This conclusion is based primarily on an examination of the books' Rosh Hashanah, Hanukkah, and Passover sections.

<sup>86</sup>Ta-Shma, *Ha-Tefillah ha-Ashkenazit ha-Qedumah*, 29–32 (see esp. n. 58); Stefan C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History* (Cambridge, 1993), 178–79; Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Prayer, Literacy, and Literary Memory in the Jewish Communities of Medieval Europe," in *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition*, ed. Ra'anan S. Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow (Philadelphia, 2011), 250–70, 256–58. See also Stefan C. Reif, "From Manuscript Codex to Printed Volume: A Novel Liturgical Transition?" in *Liturgy in the Life of the Synagogue: Studies in the History of Jewish Prayer*, ed. Ruth Langer and Steven Fine (Winona Lake, IN, 2005), 95–108, 101–4.

<sup>87</sup>Kanarfogel, "Prayer, Literacy, and Literary Memory," 258–59.

<sup>88</sup>Emanuel, *Shivrei Luhot*, 4–12.

a wide range of works of this type, including *Sefer ha-Terumah*, *Sefer ha-Roqeah*, and *Sefer Miẓvot Gadol (Semaq)*. In his fifteenth-century *minhagim* book, Ayzik Tyrnau includes references, for example, to *Or Zaru'a* and *Sefer Mordekhai*.<sup>89</sup> Like the ritual handbooks, some of these practical halakhic works could be used by a relatively wide audience of educated readers, primarily because of their tendency to limit halakhic discussions.<sup>90</sup> *Sefer Miẓvot Qatan (Semaq)*, Isaac of Corbeil's thirteenth-century halakhic code, was among the most accessible and widely disseminated works of this type.<sup>91</sup>

Despite their dependence on earlier liturgical and/or halakhic works, some of the *minhagim* books and halakhic manuals incorporate practical details and customs not found in these older sources. The later *minhagim* books, particularly the *minhagim* of Ayzik Tyrnau, include some minutiae of liturgical practice that do not generally appear in *Maḥzor Vitry* or in the thirteenth-century *minhagim* books. For instance, only Tyrnau consistently specifies the divisions of the holiday Torah readings ('*aliyyot*').<sup>92</sup> Presumably, many of the technical craft-related details included in the handbooks on circumcision and *tefillin* making had been transmitted to their authors orally or mimetically. In addition to drawing on written sources, some of the halakhic-manual authors also explicitly note their reliance on traditions acquired from teachers

---

<sup>89</sup>All the above-mentioned works were written in the thirteenth century. R. Samson and Tyrnau also cite works produced in Sefardic society, reflecting the higher level of contact between scholars in Ashkenaz and Sefarad beginning in the thirteenth century. In fact, Tyrnau cites the *Arba'ah Ṭurim (Orah Ḥayyim)*, R. Jacob b. Asher's fourteenth-century halakhic code, more frequently by far than any other source, while R. Shimshon includes occasional references to Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*.

<sup>90</sup>On the variety of accessible halakhic and semihalakhic works produced by thirteenth-century Ashkenazic scholars, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, "The Popularization of Jewish Legal and Customary Literature in Germanic Lands during the Thirteenth Century" in *Jüdische Kultur den SchUM-Städten*, ed. Karl E. Grözinger (Wiesbaden, 2014), 233–45. See also Israel Ta-Shma, "Devarim 'al ha-Semaq, 'al Qizur ha-Semaq ve-'al Sifrut ha-Qizurim," in *Qizur Sefer Miẓvot Gadol*, ed. Yehoshua Horowitz (Jerusalem, 2005), 13–21; and Judah Galinsky, "Between Ashkenaz (Germany) and Tsarfat (France): Two Approaches toward Popularizing Jewish Law," in *Jews and Christians in Thirteenth-Century France*, ed. E. Baumgarten and J. Galinsky (New York, 2015), 77–92, and "Rabbis, Readers and the Paris Book Trade," 77–83.

<sup>91</sup>Kanarfogel, "The Popularization of Jewish Legal and Customary Literature," 236; Judah Galinsky, "Arba'ah Ṭurim ve-ha-Sifrut ha-Hilkhatit shel Sefarad be-Me'ah ha-14: Aspeḳtim Hištoriyyim, Sifrutiyyim ve-Hilkhatiyyim" (Ph.D. diss., Bar-Ilan University, 1999), 128–30. Galinsky believes that *Semaq* marked the beginning of a new genre of "popular halakhic literature."

<sup>92</sup>Compare, e.g., coverage of the morning service on the first two days of Passover in Tyrnau's fifteenth-century work (*Tyrnau's Minhagim*, 52–53, 57) with that in *Maḥzor Vitry* (Goldshmidt, ed., *Maḥzor Vitry*, 2:465–67, 470) and in the *minhagim* books associated with Abraham Ḥildik (*Ḥildik's Minhagim*, 230–31) and Yeḥezqiyahu of Magdeburg (*Klausner's Minhagim*, 182–83, col. 1).

or other authorities. R. Gershom ha-Gozer mentions his uncle R. Menaḥem's circumcision-related sermons and teachings<sup>93</sup> as well as techniques and rules that he learned from R. Ya'aqov ha-Gozer, presumably a more experienced *mohel* involved in his training.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, R. Abraham of Sinsheim, the *Tiqqun Tefillin* author, cites his teacher R. Meir of Rothenburg and a preacher by the name of R. Nathan ha-Kohen as sources for several of his detailed prescriptions.<sup>95</sup> According to R. Samson b. Eliezer, in addition to giving him R. Abraham's guide, his teacher R. Yissakhar also taught him "all the received traditions [*qabbalot*] about *tefillin* that he [R. Yissakhar] knew."<sup>96</sup> Perhaps R. Samson based some of his emendations of the *Tiqqun Tefillin* text on those traditions. Like *minhagim* books, which often record local or regional liturgical practices, some of the halakhic manuals include customs that may not have been inscribed in earlier written works. R. Gershom ha-Gozer's guide appears to be the earliest source for certain circumcision-related customs—for example, lighting candles on the day of the circumcision and setting up a chair for the prophet Elijah.<sup>97</sup> In his handbook on ritual slaughter, Weil also includes quite a few references to custom, such as "our customary practice" and "in these lands it has been customary."<sup>98</sup> Perhaps the customs that he mentions—which for the most part reflect a late medieval Ashkenazic tendency toward stringency in ritual slaughter practices<sup>99</sup>—appeared in earlier written works. However, their inclusion in a concise, accessible guide may have helped disseminate them more widely.

In addition to inscribing new technical and ritual details, R. Gershom ha-Gozer and R. Abraham of Sinsheim also collected and organized information previously scattered among earlier sources.<sup>100</sup> R. Samson b. Eliezer specifically addresses this issue by comparing the advantage of consulting *Tiqqun Tefillin*, which covers everything from "the making of the parchments to the

<sup>93</sup>Glassberg, ed., *Sefer Zikhron Brit la-Rishonim*, 62, 74, 77, 80. I am accepting Emanuel's conclusion that third-person references to R. Gershom in this text appeared in first-person form in the original version of the guide. See Emanuel, "Mi-Guf Rishon le-Guf Shlishi," 438–40. On R. Menaḥem's identity, see Elbaum, "Shalosh Derashot Ashkenaziyyot," 342–43.

<sup>94</sup>See, e.g., Glassberg, ed., *Sefer Zikhron Brit la-Rishonim*, 15, 31. For a discussion of the relationship between R. Gershom and R. Ya'aqov, see Emanuel, "Mi-Guf Rishon le-Guf Shlishi," 439–40.

<sup>95</sup>*Tiqqun Tefillin*, 125, 160, 169 (R. Meir), and 153–54 (R. Nathan).

<sup>96</sup>*Barukh she-Amar*, 15.

<sup>97</sup>Many circumcision-related customs are included in, e.g., Glassberg, ed., *Sefer Zikhron Brit la-Rishonim*, 57–71. On customs recorded in R. Gershom ha-Gozer's guide, see Joel Müller, introduction to *ibid.*, xii–xix, xvii.

<sup>98</sup>See, e.g., *Sefer Sheḥitot u-Vediqot*, 35, 46–47, 52–53.

<sup>99</sup>Dinari, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz be-Shilhei Yemei ha-Benayim*, 288–89.

<sup>100</sup>According to Joel Müller (introduction to Glassberg, ed., *Sefer Zikhron Brit la-Rishonim*, xiv), the author of the circumcision guide constructed his book by collecting and organizing relevant information from all the sources available to him.

completion of the sewing.” to the inconvenience of having to comb through many different works—*Sefer ha-Terumah* and *Semag*, for example—none of which provides complete guidance for the construction of *tefillin*.<sup>101</sup> Interestingly, R. Samson, who notes Maimonides’s omission of scribal traditions in his *Mishneh Torah*, portrays the inscription of the details of these traditions as a relatively late phenomenon.<sup>102</sup>

The recording of ritual minutiae in *minhagim* books and halakhic manuals is undoubtedly related to the desire to preserve traditions that might otherwise be lost during a period of geographic mobility. However, the inscription of details may also reflect a general tendency for medieval written works to expand over time<sup>103</sup> and for ritual guides of all types to include increasingly detailed prescriptions. This tendency is particularly evident in the *minhagim* books I examined because of their close interconnections.<sup>104</sup> By providing more detailed and, in some cases, more accessible guidance than their predecessors, *minhagim*-book and halakhic-manual authors were contributing to the growing reliance on written texts as sources of practical information. In addition, they were furthering the standardization of Ashkenazic ritual practice.

It is important to bear in mind that this proliferation of written works in medieval Ashkenaz paralleled a shift toward a more text-oriented culture in Europe as a whole. This development, which has roots in the eleventh century, led during subsequent centuries to an increasing reliance on written documents in a broad range of practical areas,<sup>105</sup> including commerce,<sup>106</sup> prop-

---

<sup>101</sup> Barukh she-Amar, 15–16.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>103</sup> See Yaakov Elman and Israel Gershoni, introduction to *Transmitting Tradition: Orality and Textuality in Jewish Cultures* (New Haven, CT, 2000), 1–26, 16–17. One of the main ways in which medieval Ashkenazic works expanded was through the addition of glosses, which were sometimes incorporated within the body of the text. See, e.g., Ya‘aqov S. Shpigel, *‘Amudim be-Toldot ha-Sefer ha-Yehudi: Haggahot u-Maggihim* (Ramat Gan, 1996), 143–80, esp. 143–44, 176–80.

<sup>104</sup> For a graphic depiction of the oldest *minhagim* book’s expansion over time owing to repeated glossing, see Klausner’s *Minhagim*, 139–90, where Spitzer juxtaposes manuscript texts of the *minhagim* books associated with Yehezqiyahu of Magdeburg, Hayyim Palti’el, and Abraham Klausner. Note that this transcribed copy of the *minhagim* of Abraham Klausner does not include the external glosses, which appear in every version of the book. Tynau used the Klausner book—both the text and the glosses—as a major source for his *minhagim* book, as my comparison of the two books demonstrates. On the tendency for *minhagim* books to include increasingly detailed prescriptions over time, see my “Liturgical Minhagim Books,” 197–99, 221–23, 267–68.

<sup>105</sup> Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ, 1983), 3, 16–18.

<sup>106</sup> M. B. Parkes, “The Literacy of the Laity,” in *Scribes, Scripts and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London, 1991), 275–97,

erty transfers,<sup>107</sup> government administration,<sup>108</sup> and court proceedings.<sup>109</sup> In Germany, where the *minhagim* books and halakhic manuals were composed, urbanization and the expansion of trade were among the factors promoting an increase in the use of written documents by the thirteenth century.<sup>110</sup> Eventually, the “growth of a literate mentality”<sup>111</sup> resulted in a rise in literacy among limited segments of European society, including members of the lay nobility and the emerging professional class.<sup>112</sup> Among the literate professionals of this period were not only lawyers and physicians but also government officials, parish priests, estate managers,<sup>113</sup> and merchants involved in long-distance trade.<sup>114</sup>

The growing abundance of written works included books that were intended for the new reading audiences of this period—in Latin and, increasingly, in vernacular languages as well.<sup>115</sup> As in Ashkenazic society, a variety of practical and liturgical genres were produced. There were professional reference works, which included treatises on the law and on estate management.<sup>116</sup> During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the church produced an array of practical religious guides, including manuals of confessions and compendia of vices and virtues, in order to educate and provide a more active

---

278–80; Kathryn L. Reyerson, “Commerce and Communications,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 5, c. 1198–c. 1300, ed. David Abulafia (Cambridge, 1999), 50–70, 63.

<sup>107</sup>M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066–1307*, 3rd ed. (Chichester, 2013), 54–55; Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, “Diplomatic Sources and Medieval Documentary Practices: An Essay in Interpretive Methodology,” in *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies*, ed. John Van Engen (Notre Dame, IN, 1994), 313–43.

<sup>108</sup>Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 5, 58–64; Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*, 34–39.

<sup>109</sup>Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 274–77.

<sup>110</sup>F. R. H. Du Boulay, *Germany in the Later Middle Ages* (New York, 1983), 1–14.

<sup>111</sup>Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 2. Clanchy devotes the second half of his book to a discussion of this phenomenon.

<sup>112</sup>Parkes, “Literacy of the Laity,” 275–97. See also M. T. Clanchy, “Paper and Parchment: Manuscript Culture, 1100–1500,” in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Malden, MA, 2007), 194–206, esp. 204–5, and *From Memory to Written Record*, 236–54. Note the discussion of the differences between medieval and modern notions of literacy in Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 228–36. Like Clanchy (*ibid.*, 1–2) and Parkes (“Literacy of the Laity,” 278), Du Boulay (*Germany in the Later Middle Ages*, 6) links the growth of literacy to the increasing use of documents for practical purposes.

<sup>113</sup>Mary A. Rouse and Richard H. Rouse, *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* (Notre Dame, IN, 1991), 7; Parkes, “Literacy of the Laity,” 278–79.

<sup>114</sup>Reyerson, “Commerce and Communications,” 63.

<sup>115</sup>For more on the types of books produced in medieval Europe and their reading audiences, see, e.g., Parkes, “Literacy of the Laity,” 275–97; and Clanchy, “Paper and Parchment,” 194–206.

<sup>116</sup>Parkes, “Literacy of the Laity,” 282–83.



role for both parish priests and the laity.<sup>117</sup> Written liturgical texts and guides also became more plentiful. Prayer books, particularly books of hours, were among the most popular and widely disseminated works in late medieval Europe. The earliest books of hours were lavishly decorated volumes, intended primarily for the wealthy, especially women. However, by the early fifteenth century, books of hours, including less expensive versions, became much more widely available.<sup>118</sup> The ordinary, another medieval Christian liturgical genre, resembles the liturgical *minhagim* book, both in content and in intended function. Organized according to the liturgical year, ordinaries describe the local liturgical customs of individual Christian communities, including cathedrals, monasteries, and dioceses. Like *minhagim* books, they generally list only the incipits—the opening words—of the liturgical pieces that are part of the prayer service; these are interspersed with instructions for the master of ceremonies. Ordinaries, which emerged in the twelfth century, flourished in the thirteenth and continued to be produced throughout the late medieval period.<sup>119</sup>

Scribes were able to meet the rising demand for books somewhat more cheaply and quickly over the course of the medieval period because of changes in manuscript technology. Paper, introduced into Christian Europe in the late thirteenth century, eventually became the primary writing material everywhere since it was less expensive than parchment and easier to write on.<sup>120</sup> In addition, scribes were able to produce smaller books, including pocket-sized volumes, in part owing to the use of paper<sup>121</sup> and improvements

---

<sup>117</sup>Leonard E. Boyle OP, “The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology,” in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville, TN, 1985), 30–43, 30–35; Judith Shaw, “The Influence of Canonical and Episcopal Reform on Popular Books of Instruction,” in *ibid.*, 44–60.

<sup>118</sup>Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours* (New Haven, CT, 2006), 3–6, 11–12, 20–22, 25; and Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 111–14. According to Clanchy (*ibid.*, 112): “Liturgical manuscripts are the prime form in which the habit of using and possessing books reached the laity from the thirteenth century onwards.”

<sup>119</sup>Eric Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books: From the Beginning to the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN, 1998), 221–23.

<sup>120</sup>Malachi Beit-Arié, “How Hebrew Manuscripts Are Made,” in *A Sign and a Witness: 2,000 Years of Hebrew Books and Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. Leonard Singer Gold (New York, 1988), 35–46, 38; Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 122. According to Du Boulay (*Germany in the Later Middle Ages*, 14–15), the use of paper may have become common in Germany even earlier than it did in England, though the latter had a more advanced system of record keeping in the fourteenth century. Until about 1390, when the first paper mill was established in Germany, Germans bought paper in Italy, where it was introduced earlier than it was in Northern Europe.

<sup>121</sup>Colette Sirat, *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages*, trans. and ed. Nicholas De Lange (Cambridge, 2002), 104.



in parchment making.<sup>122</sup> The increasing use of cursive scripts, which can be written relatively quickly, also played a role in reducing book production costs.<sup>123</sup>

Ashkenazic book production did not benefit from all the efficiencies and cost-saving measures introduced eventually into the late medieval European book trade. Although in Christian Europe book production became an increasingly organized and industrialized commercial enterprise,<sup>124</sup> Hebrew manuscripts continued to be copied by individuals—either scholars or professional scribes—throughout the medieval period.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, in some respects, Ashkenazic book production actually became less efficient.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, like their Christian counterparts, Jewish scribes in medieval Europe increasingly replaced parchment with paper<sup>127</sup> and made more frequent use of cost-saving scripts. Extant manuscript evidence suggests that paper manuscripts became more common in Ashkenaz during the fifteenth century<sup>128</sup> and that semicursive scripts, which appeared in Franco-German Jewish communities by the second quarter of the thirteenth century, were used widely from the fourteenth century on.<sup>129</sup> Jewish scribes also produced more small-sized books.<sup>130</sup>

Over the course of the medieval period, both Christian and Jewish scribes increasingly improved the legibility and functionality of the manuscripts they

---

<sup>122</sup>Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 136–37, 145.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 128–32; Parkes, “Literacy of the Laity,” 285.

<sup>124</sup>Richard H. Rouse, “Production of Manuscript Books,” in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph A. Strayer (New York, 1987), 8:100–105, 103–4; Parkes, “Literacy of the Laity,” 286.

<sup>125</sup>Malachi Beit-Arié, *Hebrew Manuscripts of East and West: Towards a Comparative Codicology* (London, 1992), 81–82. Despite the individualized nature of Jewish book production, scribes in each major geocultural region—e.g., Ashkenaz—adhered to the same scribal, technological, and aesthetic norms, sometimes for as long as two centuries at a time. Malachi Beit-Arié, *Unveiled Faces of Medieval Hebrew Books: The Evolution of Manuscript Production—Progression or Regression?* (Jerusalem, 2003), 83–85.

<sup>126</sup>Beit-Arié, *Unveiled Faces*, 19–21, 24–25, 32–48. According to Beit-Arié, ruling and line-length management techniques adopted during the medieval period required more care on the part of the scribe.

<sup>127</sup>Beit-Arié, “How Hebrew Manuscripts Are Made,” 38.

<sup>128</sup>This conclusion is based on relevant searches of Sfardata: The Codicological Data-Base of the Hebrew Palaeography Project, <http://sfardata.nli.org.il/sfardatanew/home.aspx>.

<sup>129</sup>Beit-Arié, *Unveiled Faces*, 72–76. Note Beit-Arié’s discussion of how the use of semicursive scripts could potentially lower manuscript production costs.

<sup>130</sup>Sirat, *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages*, 104, 118–19. According to Sirat, books in this category are no more than 120 millimeters wide by 180 millimeters high (in octavo). Some of the extant copies of the *minhagim* books I examined were written on paper and/or in semicursive scripts, and at least one is octavo sized. For more details, see my “Liturgical Minhagim Books,” 61, n. 184.

produced—for example, through the use of spacing, paragraphing, inks of different colors, highly organized page layouts, and initial letters or words written in large-size scripts.<sup>131</sup> This shift toward greater textual clarity in Hebrew manuscripts, which emerged in the late eleventh century, accelerated rapidly among Jews in Europe during the thirteenth century.<sup>132</sup>

The composition of professional handbooks for communal functionaries in late medieval Ashkenaz should, perhaps, also be viewed within the context of another broad trend in the surrounding society—the increased emphasis on professional training and standards among Europe’s craftsmen. Craft guilds, which flourished in Europe’s cities by the thirteenth century, were interested in, among other things, ensuring the professional competence of their members and upholding high standards of craftsmanship.<sup>133</sup> Similar concerns are evident in the handbooks on *tefillin* making and circumcision, whose creators’ comprehensive and highly detailed guidance certainly reflects an interest both in establishing rigorous technical-halakhic standards for their professions and in instructing their colleagues, whose practices they sometimes condemn.<sup>134</sup> R. Abraham of Sinsheim and R. Samson b. Eliezer—the author and glossator, respectively, of *Tiqqun Tefillin*—are particularly critical of their fellow scribes. Although criticism is not a salient feature of R. Gershom ha-Gozer’s guide, he does occasionally express disapproval of the practices of his fellow *mohalim*, focusing principally on technical-medical issues.<sup>135</sup> Clearly, all these scholars were motivated primarily by halakhic considerations, but their desire for professional excellence may have some connection to values prevalent in late medieval European society.<sup>136</sup> There do seem to be

<sup>131</sup>All these features appear in *minhagim*-book manuscripts that I examined.

<sup>132</sup>On the increasing usability of Hebrew manuscripts, see Beit-Arié, *Unveiled Faces*, 49–59. For similar types of changes in Christian-produced manuscripts, see, e.g., Rouse and Rouse, *Authentic Witnesses*, 196–201; and M. B. Parkes, “The Influence of the Concepts of Ordinatio and Compilatio on the Development of the Book,” in *Scribes, Scripts and Readers*, 35–69.

<sup>133</sup>Steven Epstein, “Urban Society,” in Abulafia, ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, 5:26–37, 31–32, 34, and *An Economic and Social History of Later Medieval Europe, 1000–1500* (Cambridge, 2009), 111–17.

<sup>134</sup>In an essay on conflicts between Masoretic and halakhic traditions regarding the biblical text, Sid Leiman makes an intriguing reference to medieval Jewish scribal guilds. However, the sources he cites do not provide support for the existence of guilds of this type in medieval Ashkenaz. See Sid Z. Leiman, “Masorah and Halakhah: A Study in Conflict,” in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, ed. Mordechai Cogan, Barry L. Eichler, and Jeffrey Tigay (Winona Lake, IN, 1997), 291–306, 303–4.

<sup>135</sup>See, e.g., Glassberg, ed., *Sefer Zikhron Brit la-Rishonim*, 19–20, 47–48.

<sup>136</sup>There were certainly direct contacts between some Jewish scribes and their Christian counterparts. See, e.g., Beit-Arié, *Hebrew Manuscripts of East and West*, 7–8, 18–23; and Sarit Shalev-Eyni, *Jews among Christians: Hebrew Book Illumination from Lake Constance* (Turnhout, 2010), 1–17. Furthermore, gentiles seem to have been involved in certain aspects of *tefillin* making. See, e.g., *Tiqqun Tefillin*, 36.

parallels in the nomenclature used in the handbooks and by medieval Christian craftsmen. Practitioners—not only *tefillin* makers but also *mohalim*—are frequently referred to as *umanim* (craftsmen; sg. *uman*).<sup>137</sup> *Uman* in this context may be analogous to *master*, that is, the title used in the guild system for expert craftsmen. The term *mumḥeh* (expert), which also appears occasionally, sometimes together with *uman*,<sup>138</sup> corresponds even more clearly to the guild *master* designation.<sup>139</sup>

A fascinating passage directed at aspiring *mohalim* that is found in one version of R. Gershom's guide<sup>140</sup> is noteworthy both for its promotion of a high level of professionalism and for the terminology it uses. According to this passage, "all who want to learn the craft of circumcision" should, in addition to reading the guide, acquire hands-on experience—for example, by learning from practicing *mohalim* and through observation.<sup>141</sup> The long set of instructions found here focuses on the details of the infant's postcircumcision care because "any craftsman [*uman*] who is not also well versed in the art of healing will never be called an expert craftsman [*uman mumḥeh*]."<sup>142</sup>

Ritual handbooks figure prominently among the works composed by German Jews from the thirteenth century through the fifteenth. These works include liturgical *minhagim* books of the type presumably used by the cantor in Bamberg as well as professional guides for other kinds of communal functionaries. The flourishing of these genres is related to the demographic changes that German Jewry underwent in the late medieval period—the enormous expansion of Jewish settlement during the thirteenth century and the

<sup>137</sup>See, e.g., *Tiqqun Tefillin*, 47, 51, 60, 61; and Glassberg, ed., *Sefer Zikhron Brit la-Rishonim*, 15, 19, 38, 48. In fact, in *Tiqqun Tefillin*, 19, R. Abraham characterizes himself as an *uman ha-tefillin* (craftsman of *tefillin*).

<sup>138</sup>In his glosses, R. Samson b. Eliezer uses the term *mumḥeh* occasionally, usually in reference to scribes in Austria and/or Poland. In some cases, he seems to be differentiating between ordinary scribes and experts. See, e.g., *Barukh she-Amar*, 98–99 (gloss 55), 136–38 (gloss 85), 142 (gloss 89), 168–69 (gloss 109). According to the circumcision guide (Glassberg, ed., *Sefer Zikhron Brit la-Rishonim*, 54–55), if no one with the ability to perform circumcisions is available, one should wait until it is possible to go to a "skilled and expert *mohel*" (*mohel uman u-mumḥeh*). See the discussion below of a passage found in one version of the circumcision guide, which includes the phrase *uman mumḥeh*.

<sup>139</sup>For a discussion of the shift toward professionalization among Christians and Jews in late medieval Europe that includes the claim that there are philological parallels between titles used in the guild system and titles used in the Ashkenazic rabbinate, see Yuval, *Ḥakhamim be-Doram*, 336–37, 340–49.

<sup>140</sup>This highly adapted version of the circumcision guide is found in *Sefer ha-Asufot* (see n. 27 above). Note that the author of this text attributes this passage to R. Gershom ha-Gozer.

<sup>141</sup>Glassberg, ed., *Sefer Zikhron Brit la-Rishonim*, 136–37 (quote 136).

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid.*, 137–39 (quote 137).

first half of the fourteenth and the transient nature of Jewish life in the post-Black Death period. These changes led to disruptions in the transmission of traditions and thus to a need for written sources of ritual guidance. However, the composition of *minhagim* books and halakhic manuals was also related to the increase in the production of written texts in medieval Ashkenaz. Among these texts were a variety of liturgical and practical halakhic genres, some of which served as sources for the ritual handbooks, though typically the handbooks are more accessible than their predecessors and include more practical details. The greater availability of ritual handbooks during the late medieval period reflects a growing reliance on written works for the transmission of practical information, which helped promote a shift toward the greater standardization of Ashkenazic ritual practice. Books became more user-friendly and, perhaps, somewhat less expensive to produce. Thus, even before the advent of print, there were significant changes in the use and production of books in Ashkenazic society, just as there were in Christian Europe.<sup>143</sup> Although the invention of the printing press reinforced and accelerated these trends, their roots are in the late medieval period.

---

<sup>143</sup>The research of some of the historians I have cited—that of, e.g., M. B. Parkes, M. T. Clanchy, and Richard H. Rouse—on the shift in medieval Europe to a more text-oriented culture undermines the notion, promoted in particular by Elizabeth Eisenstein, that the invention of the printing press represented a radical break with late medieval culture and society. See Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1979). My conclusions are consistent with the more evolutionary approach regarding the effects of print that has become predominant in recent scholarship on medieval and early modern Europe. See Roger Chartier, “The Printing Revolution: A Reappraisal,” in *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein* (Amherst, MA, 2007), 397–408. For explicit rejections of Eisenstein’s views, see, e.g., Anthony T. Grafton, “The Importance of Being Printed,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11, no. 2 (Autumn 1980): 265–86; M. T. Clanchy, “Looking Back from the Invention of Printing,” *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress* 39, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 168–83; Rouse and Rouse, *Authentic Witnesses*, 449–66; and Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago, 1998). Compare Elchanan Reiner, “The Ashkenazi Élite at the Beginning of the Modern Era: Manuscript versus Printed Book,” *Polin* 10 (1997): 85–98; and Moshe Rosman, “Innovative Tradition: Jewish Culture in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,” in *Cultures of the Jews*, ed. David Biale (New York, 2002), 530–70, 530–47.