

bis in the Soviet Union. In the middle of the 1970s, the last of the older rabbis died. From that time on, appropriately trained rabbis could no longer be found in the USSR, and those who served in rabbinic posts were usually graduates of the progressive (Neolog) rabbinical seminary in Budapest.

In Hungary, communal rabbis resumed their activity after the end of World War II, though their legal authority was limited. Orthodox rabbis tried to reactivate some of the yeshivas, but these institutions were closed in 1956 at the time of the Hungarian uprising. Several rabbis left Hungary together with their students and moved to Israel or the United States. The Neolog Rabbinical Seminary also started up again after the war and, among other things, engaged in the limited publication of rabbinic works.

In Romania, the chief rabbi became the official representative of the Jewish community before the authorities. Mozes Rosen, who had been chosen as chief rabbi of Romanian Jewry in 1948, was appointed in 1964 to serve also as the head of the Jewish Federation, a position that he filled until his death in 1994 [see the biography of Rosen].

[See also Orthodoxy; and Reform, Religious.]

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—HAIM GERTNER

Translated from Hebrew by David Strauss

RABBINIC LITERATURE

[To survey religious and scholarly writings by East European rabbis, this entry is divided chronologically into two articles, the first covering the period up to 1800 and the second from 1800 until 2000. For the role of the rabbi, see Rabbinate. For prayers and prayer books, see Liturgy; for sermons, see Preachers and Preaching. See also Talmud Study.]

Rabbinic Literature before 1800

Although Jewish communities existed in Eastern Europe from at least the eleventh century, significant records of rabbinic literary output only emerged from the region in the sixteenth century. Prague was the first center of rabbinic scholarship of

note in Eastern Europe (Avigdor Kara moved there from Ratisbon [Regensburg] in the early fifteenth century), but the city's Jewish community suffered threats and expulsions during the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and entered a period of cultural decline. At the same time that conditions in Prague worsened, Jewish communities in Poland enjoyed a period of relative peace and economic expansion that allowed rabbinic scholarship to flourish, particularly in important centers such as Kraków and Lublin, pushing Poland to the forefront of contemporary rabbinic culture. Even though the Khmel'nyts'kyi uprising in the eastern territories in 1648–1649 (Yid., *gzeyres takh vetat*) and the Swedish invasions in 1654–1656 in western and central regions disrupted Jewish life, Poland's yeshivas continued to function and soon reemerged as centers of rabbinic studies, once again attracting students from the West to their doors.

On the whole, rabbinic writing in Eastern Europe was highly traditional in character. The Bible and its exegesis, including sermons that took scripture as a point of departure if not making it the focus of discussion; the Babylonian Talmud and its commentaries; legal codes; and ethical writings formed the nucleus of rabbinic literature. Rabbis also composed liturgical pieces, both *piyyutim* and *selihot* (hymns and penitential prayers), and there was also some study of and commentary on the prayer book, but these were secondary fields of endeavor. Few rabbis delved into speculative philosophy beyond that which had been inherited from the Jewish culture of the Middle Ages. With the advent of Jewish mysticism in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, many became involved in studying and popularizing what they perceived as hidden meanings of the Torah.

Biblical Commentaries and Supercommentaries

East European Jewry emphasized commentaries on the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the so-called *hamesh megilot* (Five Scrolls: Esther, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes)—texts that had liturgical functions in the synagogue or the home. The preoccupation with these works rather than with each and every book of the Bible suggests that while East European Jewry did not question the authority of biblical texts, intellectual interests focused on sources that were part of ritual life. Indeed, published commentaries on the Pentateuch, such as

those of Efrayim Shelomoh of Luntshits (*Ir giborim*; 1580, *'Olelot Efrayim*; 1590, and *Keli yakar*; 1602), were often based on public sermons delivered each week, revolving around the weekly Torah reading. Comprehensive analysis of the entire biblical corpus was all but unheard of. As the study of Jewish mysticism spread in Eastern Europe, kabbalistic biblical commentaries did appear, but here, too, the focus tended to be on biblical books that were in some way part of the liturgy.

The biblical commentary of the great northern French rabbi Shelomoh ben Yitshak (known by the acronym Rashi; d. 1105) was the fundamental text that accompanied Bible study from the most elementary to the most advanced level. Contemporary rabbis—and not just in Eastern Europe—took a special interest in trying to identify the textual difficulties that prompted Rashi's comments. Such supercommentary was not a new feature of Ashkenazic rabbinic culture, but it became far more popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Commentaries on Rashi's comments were written by some of the leading rabbis of the age, including Yehudah Leib (Maharal) of Prague (*Gur aryeh 'al ha-Torah*; 1578), whose explanations of Rashi often developed into discursive expositions of Jewish thought; Shelomoh Luria of Lublin (*Yeri'ot Shelomoh*; 1609); and Mordekhai Yafeh ([Jaffe] *Levush ha-orah*; 1604), who not only dealt with Rashi but also engaged the views of other commentaries on Rashi. In the long term, perhaps the most popular commentary on Rashi was Shabetai Bass's *Sifte hakhamim* (1712), which dealt with Rashi's comments on the Pentateuch and the *hamesh megilot*. Bass summarized the comments of others while adding original insights of his own that were often of great help in understanding Rashi's own remarks. The work enjoyed numerous reprintings, especially after it was abridged.

Rashi's comments served not only as a point of departure for exegetes' own views but also as an opportunity to raise questions on his commentary from the independent commentaries of other scholars—notably those from the Sephardic world, such as Avraham Saba and Yitshak Abravanel. In the course of the seventeenth century, East European Jewry became more and more focused on halakhic matters, and commentaries on Rashi tended to stress legal matters as well,

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Most biblical commentaries were published in Hebrew and were intended for a relatively well-educated readership, but the vast majority of Jews in Eastern Europe could not understand such texts. To address this latter audience, rabbis prepared translations and commentaries in the vernacular. Yiddish readers, who had access to novels and epic stories printed in German and later in Yiddish, were not enthralled by simple translations of the biblical text, however, and Yiddish translations, whether of the Pentateuch or of other biblical books, had to fight for the attention of readers. In their attempt to be appealing, Yiddish translations of the Bible became more homiletical commentaries than translations. The most outstanding example of this genre was unquestionably the *Tsene-rene* by Ya'akov Ashkenazi of Janów (before 1622), one of the most popular Yiddish books of all time, particularly among female readers. It offered midrashim, parables, and moral instruction organized around the weekly portions of the Pentateuch, the *haftarot*, and the *hamesh megilot*.

Talmudic Commentaries and Glosses

Despite some criticism, most notably from Maharal of Prague, Talmud stood at the center of the curriculum of advanced study in Eastern Europe throughout this period, and Talmudic commentaries were a central rabbinic endeavor. Although the Jerusalem Talmud was known and a number of commentaries were written on it in Eastern Europe, it was the Babylonian Talmud that was the primary object of study and reference, as it had been for centuries in Ashkenazic rabbinic culture. The Jerusalem Talmud's peripheral place in East European Jewish study can probably best be gauged by the fact that it was published but once before 1800 in all of Eastern Europe—in Kraków in 1609, with relatively brief comments by David Darshan.

Commentaries were written on a number of aspects of the Babylonian Talmud as writers tried to ascertain the correct meaning of the Talmud and of the two standard commentaries taught in East European yeshivas: namely, Rashi and Tosafot (lit., "additions"; they were the glosses of some of the descendants of Rashi and their students, who lived in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, mainly in northern France and Germany). Some East European rabbis analyzed Talmudic arguments, raising and solving textual and legal difficulties based on specific passages, while others juxtaposed passages from various sources in the Tal-

mudic corpus or compared them with comments of Rashi and the Tosafists. There was a basic assumption that Talmudic passages should not contradict one another, and great efforts were expended trying to resolve apparent contradictions. *Pilpul*, a general name given to this latter form of intellectual inquiry, enjoyed popularity for centuries in the yeshivas of Eastern Europe but was subject to severe criticism by those who preferred a closer and often less contrived reading of the text. Alternative readings of texts were offered as solutions to particular textual quandaries, but not always on the basis of manuscripts or earlier sources.

The rise of rabbinic culture in Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland, coincided with the advent of Hebrew and Yiddish printing in the region, and some aspects of rabbinic scholarship were closely tied to the spread of the printed book, particularly to editions of the Talmud. Well aware that printing multiplied the significance of a textual error, not only because of the distribution and sheer numbers of the printed text but also because people of the era gave extra credence to the printed word, rabbis of the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries (Shelomoh Luria, Shemu'el Edels, Me'ir ben Gedalyah of Lublin, and Yo'el Sirkes, among others) paid great attention to correcting the text of the Talmud. Sometimes corrections were based on manuscripts or citations in earlier works, but in other instances emendations were made simply on the basis of a knowledgeable reading of the text: that is, those familiar with the Talmud knew how terms and phrases generally appeared in rabbinic literature, and corrected accordingly. Many of these corrections were ultimately incorporated into either the text or the margins of the standard Vilna edition of the Talmud.

Beyond dealing with problems of the Talmudic text, commentators went to great lengths to solve questions within the commentaries of Rashi and the Tosafot. Sometimes they attempted to solve problems inherent in a particular section; sometimes they tried to answer questions raised by the Tosafists against Rashi; and sometimes they answered queries that the Tosafists themselves raised, some of which had been left unresolved. Ya'akov Yehoshu'a ben Tsevi Hirsh Falk's *Pene Yehoshu'a* (1739) is a prime example of a work that does each of these, and it became a mainstay of Talmudic study in Eastern Europe. Other such efforts, such

as those of Shemu'el Edels and Me'ir ben Gedalyah of Lublin, were ultimately published as appendixes to each tractate of the Babylonian Talmud, where they could easily be referred to by students studying the text.

In a departure from most exegeses of the period, Shelomoh Luria used his commentary on the Talmud (*Yam shel Shelomoh*, partially lost; those sections that were published all appeared posthumously) as the basis for full-blown legal studies. Rejecting contemporary attempts at legal codification, Luria began with the Talmudic source and traced the development of legal thought on any given topic until he arrived at practical legal conclusions that reflected his own understanding of the Talmud and of subsequent legal traditions, most of them Ashkenazic.

Attitudes toward nonlegal sections of the Talmud (*agadah*) varied. Even though some people specialized in the study of *agadah* and of rabbinic midrashim, some rabbis thought it a less serious discipline than law (*halakhah*). Edels made great efforts to remain faithful to the plain meaning of the aggadic text even when dealing with what might appear to the modern reader to be figures of speech and hyperboles (*Hidushe agadot*; pt. 1, 1627; pt. 2, 1631). He seems to have felt uncomfortable questioning the simple meaning of the words of the Talmud and, by implication, the integrity of Talmudic sages themselves. In some instances, however, even Edels went beyond the plain meaning of the text and used allegory and other forms of interpretation to give the text a deeper and more coherent significance.

Yehezkel Landau evidenced no such hesitation. Writing almost two centuries later in Prague, he considered nonlegal sections of the Talmud to be repositories of layers of additional meaning, particularly in the realm of Jewish mysticism. Rejecting the scoffs of Enlightenment Jewish scholars that *agadah* was not to be taken seriously, Landau searched for what he believed to be hidden meanings in the words of the rabbis.

As with biblical exegesis, interpretations of *agadah* were often influenced by the social and religious conditions of the day. For example, comments about contemporary communal leadership, if not outright criticisms, were not uncommon.

Legal Codes and Commentaries

Rabbinic legal commentaries were not limited to the Talmudic text; glosses and discussion of post-Talmudic rabbinic legal

texts were part and parcel of the Ashkenazic tradition. East European Jewry continued this tradition, studying and commenting on legal codes that had attained widespread acceptance in Ashkenazic rabbinic culture. Ya'akov ben Asher's fourteenth-century *Tur* enjoyed particular popularity in Poland, although Mosheh of Coucy's thirteenth-century *Sefer mitsvot gadol* was also in use. Guidebooks on specific topics, such as Yitshak ben Me'ir of Düren's *Sha'are Dura* on the laws of kashrut (second half of the 13th century), also had a firm place on the shelf of rabbis and professionals involved in the preparation of kosher meat. Glosses were often written in the margins of such texts to explain the meaning of particular words and phrases or to elaborate on specific legal passages. Extending the practice used in Talmud study, questions were often raised from other sources on specific rulings in these texts and attempts were made to answer them.

The study of these and similar codes was challenged by the publication of Yosef Karo's code of Jewish law, the *Shulhan 'arukh*, with glosses of Mosheh Isserles (1570–1578). The combination of Karo's text and Isserles' comments offered readers a concise statement of the law that reflected variations between Ashkenazic and Sephardic customs. The work enjoyed almost immediate popularity in Eastern Europe—especially among yeshiva students, who thought (much to the chagrin of the heads of their yeshivas) that they could now learn the law with ease. Leading rabbis of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries often rejected the use of this handy code and preferred the *Tur* and other traditional Ashkenazic sources, in which there was a full discussion of sources and of the rationales underlying the law. They fought a losing battle, however. Although Yehoshu'a Falk (*Perishah u-derishah*; 1635–1638) and Yo'el Sirkes (*Bayit hadash*; 1631–1639) both wrote comprehensive companion texts on the *Tur* that elucidated the law, they could not stem the tide. Commentaries on portions of the *Shulhan 'arukh* began to appear in the 1640s, and from this point on the *Shulhan 'arukh* began to eclipse all other works, on its way to becoming the standard reference work for halakhic decision making.

The most significant of these early commentaries on portions of the *Shulhan 'arukh* was Shabetai ben Me'ir ha-Kohen's *Sifte Kohen* (1646; he was known by the acronym *Shakh*). This work offered sources

for the rulings of Karo and Isserles, introduced new circumstances and precedents for consideration, and sometimes simply clarified the text. Like many subsequent authors, Shabetai was willing to take Karo and Isserles to task for their rulings, but he also defended their opinions against others. Demonstrating keen analytical ability, his commentary became the basis for Ashkenazic practice in a number of fields until the present day. *Sifte Kohen* was also extremely important in opening up the Ashkenazic legal world to numerous Sephardic legal texts that had been published in the Ottoman Empire.

As commentaries around the pages of the *Shulhan 'arukh* developed, some authors engaged in a dialogue of sorts with other commentators. Printed attacks fostered printed counterattacks; one of the most famous of such disputes was that between Shabetai and David ben Shemu'el, author of the *Ture zahav* (1646; the acronym of which, *Taz*, ultimately became the author's own acronym).

Not surprisingly, commentators brought to bear on their study of the *Shulhan 'arukh* methods that they had learned in studying the Talmud. As the Tosafists did with respect to Talmud study, commentators compared sections of the text to try to ensure textual harmony; they also updated the text by citing recent decisions. In the eighteenth century, the *pilpul* method, which was so popular in the study of Talmud, was applied to the *Shulhan 'arukh* and to the realm of *halakhah* in general. Yonatan Eybeschütz's *Kereti u-feleti* (1763) and Aryeh Leib Heller's *Ketsot ha-hoshen* (2 parts; 1788 and 1796) were outstanding examples of such halakhic *pilpul* and engendered an ongoing scholarly polemic. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Gaon of Vilna tried to reconnect the *Shulhan 'arukh* with Talmudic sources. Searching through the entire corpus of Talmudic literature, including the Jerusalem Talmud and midrashim, he suggested possible antecedents for Karo's and Isserles' decisions.

As commentaries on the *Shulhan 'arukh* increased, there invariably arose a need to summarize the resultant legal discussions and make the *Shulhan 'arukh* once again a usable guide. The earliest of such summaries, appearing in the first half of the eighteenth century, was Aleksander Shor of Żółkiew's *Simlah hadashah* (1733), on the laws of ritual slaughtering; this trend strengthened as the eighteenth century progressed. There were also attempts, most notably by Yosef Te'omim in his *Peri*

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megadim (1772), to use the margins of the *Shulḥan 'arukh* to clarify and if need be state clearly principles in various topics in Jewish law. [See *Shulḥan 'Arukh*.]

Responsa

East European rabbis also continued the longstanding practice of answering specific legal questions addressed to them. As in every generation, the questions addressed to rabbinic authorities reflected the needs and issues of the day. Discussions of letters of credit, the authority of Jewish communal self-government, and the use of non-Jewish labor in Jewish-owned enterprises on the Sabbath and festivals were common. Scientific and technological advances, too, raised legal questions, such as those pertaining to the permissibility of autopsies and the use of mechanical clocks to measure time on the Sabbath. But the vast majority of responsa dealt with ongoing questions of ritual observance—involving, for example, ritual slaughtering, mourning, divorce, or levirate marriage—in unusual circumstances. Generally speaking, such questions were addressed by local leaders, often in distant communities, to rabbis perceived to be the leading legal scholars of the generation.

Not all responsa were collected, and not all collections were published or even survived in manuscript. Among the most influential published collections from authors of the period were the responsa of Moshe Isserles (1640), Shelomoh Luria (1574), Yo'el Sirkes (1697; 1785), Ya'akov Reischer (1709–1789), and Yehezkel Landau (1776–1811). These and other rabbis brought diverse perspectives and backgrounds to the halakhic endeavor, and answers to the very same questions often differed. Questions of personal status in particular, especially those related to divorce, engendered different responses from different rabbis.

The questions raised in responsa literature of the period were not always actually asked of rabbis. Sometimes the writers of responsa themselves presented questions for discussion and proceeded to answer them, although more often than not they did not note that they were both the questioner and the respondent—a phenomenon that in Ashkenazic circles went at least as far back as the fifteenth century. Though such self-addressed questions were atypical in the sixteenth century, by the late eighteenth century the responsum had become an accepted format for halakhic essay writing. An influential example of this form of responsa

writing was Aryeh Leib Gintsburg's *Sha'agat Aryeh* (1755; possibly 1739), in which the author usually used *pilpul* methodology to resolve his own questions.

Commentaries on responsa from this period, such as Yitshak Grishaber's on the responsa of his teacher, Yehezkel Landau (published in Ashkelon, 1990–2004), are rare but not unknown.

Popularizations and Handbooks

The advent of printing offered an opportunity for the popularization of Jewish law through the publication of handbooks in the Yiddish vernacular. Although there had been opposition to such an endeavor from no less an authority than Ya'akov Molin in the fifteenth century, *Azhores noshim*, a Yiddish-language guide to the laws of menstruation, challah, and candlelighting was published in Kraków in 1535, specifically written for women and printed in a small format so that it would be inexpensive and easy to carry. A new version of the work was prepared by Binyamin Slonik (1577), who would eventually become one of the leading rabbis of his generation, and it became the basis for subsequent publications on these topics well into the eighteenth century.

The presentation of the law in such manuals tended to be straightforward, although stories did punctuate these works to make them more attractive reading. The Slonik volume is of particular significance because it often followed the rulings of the recently published *Shulḥan 'arukh* and, by translating the rulings of Karo and Isserles into Yiddish, helped spread the code's positions and secure its place in East European Jewish society. Shim'on Günzburg's translation of Yitshak Tyrnau's *Sefer ha-minhagim* into Yiddish (first edition, Venice, 1589), an overview of the yearly ritual cycle, was another such popularization of the law. The reprinting of the work almost 50 times by the mid-nineteenth century in Jewish communities across Europe is a sure sign of its importance.

Philosophical Works

Although philosophy was studied in various circles, particularly in Prague in the fifteenth century, it did not become a mainstream endeavor in East European rabbinic culture. Still—perhaps owing to factors such as the dissemination of printed books, the influx of philosophical works from the Sephardic world into Eastern Europe, and the influence of contemporary Christian society—a traditional form of philosophy based on earlier Jew-

ish sources such as Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* (twelfth century) and Yosef Albo's *Book of Principles* (fifteenth-century Spain), did become part and parcel of the education and study of a number of leading rabbis in Eastern Europe until about 1650. Rabbis such as Isserles, Avraham Horowitz, and Yom Tov Lipmann Heller studied and wrote philosophical works, although the number of such works never came close to approaching the number of biblical commentaries or volumes on topics of Jewish law. Isserles included philosophical study in the curriculum of his Kraków yeshiva—but, again, only philosophy as found in traditional Jewish sources, in this case Maimonides' *Eight Chapters*.

There was opposition to philosophical study in the Jewish community—expressed most notably, perhaps, in a public controversy that broke out in Prague in 1559. Opponents saw speculative study as heresy, while proponents viewed it not only as a traditional and legitimate field of endeavor but also as one that would help in understanding difficult aggadic passages, such as those that anthropomorphized God. It was also claimed that the study of philosophy would enhance the image of the Jew in the eyes of non-Jewish contemporaries in Eastern Europe and allow Jews to explain rabbinic literature to non-Jews in a more intelligent fashion. Even enthusiasts of philosophy, however, such as Mordekhai Yafeh, argued that one should study the Bible, Talmud, and Jewish law first and turn to philosophy only when proficiency in these subjects had been attained.

This is not to say that there were no significant developments in the field of Jewish thought in Eastern Europe during this period, for there certainly were. It is just that East European rabbis—even Maharshal of Prague, who was among the most original and creative thinkers—tended to express philosophical ideas in traditional forms, typically as exegesis of biblical or Talmudic texts. Conscious resort to Aristotelian or other non-Jewish concepts was simply not part of the local frame of reference.

Jewish philosophy never gained mass appeal among East European Jews, and those who tried to study it often had difficulty doing so. This prompted the publication at about the turn of the seventeenth century of a number of study aids, such as Ya'akov Koppelman's *Ohel Ya'akov* (1584), a book intended to help those studying Albo's philosophical treatise.

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With the coming of Jewish mysticism to Eastern Europe, philosophy found itself replaced by Kabbalah. While there were transitional figures, such as Heller, who continued to study philosophy, by the mid-seventeenth century Jewish philosophy had become an all-but-forgotten discipline in the region. Although there would be a revival of the study of Jewish philosophy in Eastern Europe around the beginning of the eighteenth century, the discipline would not be dominated by rabbis as it had been.

Ethical Literature

As was true with respect to Jewish philosophy, writers in Eastern Europe very much relied on medieval literature in compiling their own ethical works. The writings of Asher ben Yehi'el, Yonah Gerondi, Bahya ibn Pakuda', and others either were republished or became the basis for ethical writings of the period. The goal of such literature was not only to improve the soul but also to ensure proper religious faith and behavior among readers. Because *halakhah* was so central to Jewish intellectual life, local writers tended to express themselves in practical guidebooks rather than through the more philosophical writings that had characterized Jewish ethicists in Muslim and Christian Spain. Ethics were often intertwined not only with Jewish law but with biblical and Talmudic exegesis as well, and explanations of biblical passages became a context for discussing topics such as the abuse and evils of wealth, the need to conduct oneself honestly, and the importance of proper communal leadership.

Ethical works were also a means of reinforcing traditional behavior and combating social deviance. The literature recognized human frailties and vices and urged readers not to submit to their base desires but to show strength and, if necessary, repent. To this end, authors made extensive use of examples, parables, and allegories in seeking to inculcate in readers both a fear of God and a desire to change their ways. Discussions were not limited to ritual life, but included instruction on proper familial relations (including sexual relations) and education of the young. The ideal woman was portrayed as someone who spent her time out of the public eye. Married women were to raise their children and help their husbands at home. Men were expected to spend their days in the workplace making a living, but to dedicate some of their time to communal prayer and the rabbinic ideal of study.

Ethical literature appeared in Yiddish already in the sixteenth century. Some such texts were legal guides with moral instruction; others were translations or adaptations of earlier Hebrew works. Perhaps the most famous of the former was Mosheh Altschul's *Brantshpigl*, first published in Kraków in 1596. Specifically addressed to women but, like all Yiddish literature of the day, written with an eye to male readers as well, Altshuler instructed readers on how to attain a virtuous lifestyle in this world, with the promise that they would enjoy the full fruits of their self-sacrifice in the world to come.

The character of ethical literature changed dramatically with the introduction of Jewish mysticism into Eastern Europe. The ideas of Mosheh Cordovero (d. 1570) and Yitshak Luria (d. 1572), both of whom flourished in Safed, began to infuse ethical works, and authors instructed readers to behave in accordance with mystical doctrines without any expectation that readers would become experts in the broader field of Jewish mysticism. These changes became a permanent fixture of Jewish ethical writing in Eastern Europe in the early eighteenth century, in works such as Tsevi Hirsh Koidanover's *Kav ha-yashar* (1705). Koidanover used both Talmudic and kabbalistic sources to convince his readers of the importance of observing the law properly, and he enumerated the rewards awaiting the righteous and the horrors that sinners would suffer in this world and the world to come. Kabbalistic customs and doctrines, such as *gilgul neshamot* (the transmigration of souls), were presented as being of equal importance with Talmudic rabbinic traditions. Given that *Kav ha-yashar* enjoyed dozens of printings after Koidanover himself translated it into Yiddish, its influence in spreading kabbalistic ideas should not be underestimated. The advent of Hasidim in the eighteenth century only strengthened the fusion of rabbinic and kabbalistic traditions.

Ethical wills, in which parents instructed their children about proper behavior, were another means of moralizing. Sometimes such letters became full-blown monographs, the most important example of which was Yesha'yah Horowitz's *Shene luhot ha-berit* (1649), a work that was ostensibly intended only for family members but became one of the most popular ethical works of the period, especially after it was adapted and translated into Yiddish.

[The principal figures mentioned are the subject of independent biographical entries.]

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Rabbinic Literature after 1800

The literature produced by rabbis after 1800 grew organically out of the literature produced before this date. Rabbis of the period referred (and often deferred) to the canonical works that preceded them, and they embraced all the traditional genres of the rabbinic world. At the same time, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw enormous cultural, religious, and political changes in the Jewish community and the world of Eastern Europe in general. The literature produced by the rabbinic elite could not help but be shaped by those changes in different ways. Rabbis in this period gave new form to the old genres, and pioneered new ones as they sought to maintain the (partially imaginary) supremacy of the rabbinic ways of life.

Bible Commentaries

As in previous generations, the Bible, especially the Torah, remained the focus

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