

The ‘Imagined Communities’ of Yom Ṭov Lipman Mühlhausen: Heresy and Communal Boundaries in *Sefer Nizahon*^{*}

Milan Žonca[†]

I

Shortly before his death, the Bishop of Brandenburg Stephan Bodeker (1384–1459) decided to collect polemical arguments in defence of the Catholic faith, as formulated by many saints and doctors of the Church.¹ Dictated to a scribe, the manuscript copy of this unfinished collection was then corrected and annotated in the Bishop’s own dense and hasty handwriting.² With this collection, Bodeker aimed to provide ‘a directory or at least a handy supply of material’

^{*}This is a post-print version of an article that was published in *The Jews of Europe around 1400. Disruption, Crisis, and Resilience*, ed. by Lukas Clemens and Christoph Cluse (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018), pp. 119–42.

[†]The present article is based on Chapter Two of my PhD thesis, ‘Difference and Intellectual Diversity in Late-Medieval Ashkenaz, 1350–1500’ (Queen Mary, University of London, 2015). I wish to thank Matthew Champion, Miri Rubin, Miranda Stanyon, and Tamás Visi, who offered valuable comments on drafts of this chapter. I am also grateful to Martin Borýsek, Christoph Cluse, and the participants of the conference ‘European Jewry Around 1400’ in Trier in 2015 for helpful suggestions on the papers from which both this article and the thesis chapter evolved. The article was completed thanks to a postdoctoral project at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

¹On Bodeker’s life and work, see Annette Wigger, *Stephan Bodeker O. Praem., Bischof von Brandenburg (1421–1459): Leben, Wirken und ausgewählte Werke*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, 3/532 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1992), pp. 1–96. On his anti-Jewish writings, see Bernhard Walde, *Christliche Hebraisten Deutschlands am Ausgang des Mittelalters*, Alttestamentliche Abhandlungen, 6 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1916), pp. 30–63.

²Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS theol. lat. fol. 118. A digitized copy of this manuscript can be consulted online [here](#). For a codicological description, see Valentin

for preachers who took up the call for obligatory annual sermons to the Jews, p. 120 issued by the Council of Basel in 1434.³ The need for such a handbook seemed to be more acute than ever, as the Jews themselves already possessed a similar polemical tool. According to Bodeker, it was written by a certain Jew named *Libman* who lived in the city of Cracow around 1420:

In his insolent pride, he was not content with the blasphemies against our Lord Jesus Christ, his Blessed Mother and the holy Catholic Church pronounced by his ancestors in the books of the Talmud, but to these old blasphemies he added new ones, writing most obvious falsehoods against us. He certainly had some knowledge of Latin—as appears from his books—and seems to have attended sermons by preachers to the laity. From these he summarized almost all the testimonies of the Law and the Prophets that speak of Christ in his *Nizachon*, that is Victory, and argued against them as well as he could.⁴

By the time when Bodeker was dictating his passionate rebuttal, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, the author of *Sefer Nizachon* (*The Book of Polemic*) and one of the most versatile late-medieval Ashkenazic scholars, had been dead for almost forty years.⁵ Apart from Bodeker's reference, there is no evidence

Rose, *Verzeichniss der lateinischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, vol. II, *Die Handschriften der Kurfürstlichen Bibliothek und der Kurfürstlichen Lande*, part I (Berlin: Asher & Co., 1901), pp. 469–73.

³[U]t et si concilium Basiliense de predicacionibus Judeis faciendis ad practicam poneretur, hic in partibus sicut alibi fieri et maxime in Hispania intellexi haberent ipsi predicatorum ex hic collectis directorium vel saltem occasionem materias predicabiles ipsis Iudeis inveniendi.' Wigger, *Stephan Bodeker* (as in n. 1), p. 137; cf. Rose, *Verzeichniss* (as in n. 2), p. 470. All the translations that follow are mine, unless noted otherwise.

⁴Surrexit eciam novissime quidam Judeus, circa annos Domini M° CC CC XX vel supra vel infra in regno Polonie in civitate Cracovia, qui se nominat Rabi Libman, qui contumaci superbia, non contentus de blasphemia suorum progenitorum contra dominum nostrum Jesum Christum, suam benedictam matrem, sanctam quoque ecclesiam catholicam in libris Thalmud blasphemant, novas blasphemias veteribus adiunxit; ubi et apertissima mendacia contra nos scribit, in latina namque lingua, utique parumper eruditus — ut ex scriptis suis apparet — fuit; et sermonibus predicatorum qui ad populum laycum fiunt interfuisse videtur unde quasi omnia testimonia legis et prophetarum que de Christo sunt in suo Nizachon, id est victoria, resumit et quantum in eo est reprobant.' Wigger, *Stephan Bodeker* (as in n. 1), p. 138, n. 186; cf. Rose, *Verzeichniss* (as in n. 2), pp. 470–71.

⁵On Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, see Yehuda Kaufmann, *Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen: Polemicist, Philosopher, and Kabbalist* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary,

that Lipman ever lived in Cracow, although this possibility cannot be completely ruled out.⁶ However, in the *responsa* of his contemporaries he is often referred to as Rabbi Lipman of Prague.⁷ p. 121

Lipman first appears in the records in Prague in 1406, but he must have arrived at least a couple of years earlier, given the fact that in 1407 he was already a member of the local communal establishment.⁸ Furthermore, a poem located in one of the earliest manuscripts of *Sefer Nizahon* suggests that the book was completed in Prague.⁹ Lipman served as a member of the local rab-

1927) (in Hebrew); Vladimír Sadek, 'Yom Tov Lipman Mülhausen and His Rationalistic Way of Thinking', *Judaica Bohemiae*, 24 (1988), 98–113; *Germania Judaica*, Bd. III, 1350–1519, ed. by Arye Maimon, Mordechai Breuer, and Yacov Guggenheim, 3 vols (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987–2003), II (1995), pp. 1129–31. On *Sefer Nizahon*, see Frank Talmage's Hebrew introduction to the facsimile of Hackspan's 1644 edition of the text (Jerusalem: Dinur, 1983), translated into English as 'Sefer Ha-Niṣṣahon of R. Yom Tov Lipmann Muehlhausen', in *Apples of Gold in Settings of Silver: Studies in Medieval Jewish Exegesis and Polemics*, ed. by Barry Dov Walfish (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1999), pp. 319–56; Israel Jacob Yuval, 'Kabbalisten, Ketzer und Polemiker: Das kulturelle Umfeld des Sefer ha-Nizachon', in *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism*, ed. by Karl Erich Grözinger and Joseph Dan, *Studia Judaica*, 13 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1995), pp. 155–71; Ora Limor and Israel Jacob Yuval, 'Skepticism and Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Doubters in "Sefer Ha-Nizzahon"', in *Hebraica veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Allison Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 159–80.

⁶There are reasons to doubt Bodeker's information, especially since his dating of *Sefer Nizahon* is incorrect. The text contains a messianic prediction for the year 1405, it must have therefore been written before this date. See Kaufmann, *Lipman Mühlhausen* (as in n. 5), pp. 62–63.

⁷Shalom of Neustadt, *Decisions and Customs of Rabbi Shalom of Neustadt* (in Hebrew), ed. by Shlomo J. Spitzer (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalayim, 1977), no. 164 (מה"ר ליפמן מפרגא כתב) (למהר"ש ז"ל). See also Solomon Luria, *Yam shel Shelomo* (Jerusalem, 1996), Giṭin, 4:31 (מעשה) (ששלח מהר"ר ליפמן מפרגא ז"ל גט לאיגרא כתב מה"ר) (*Sefer Mizvot Katan*, dealing with the issue of calendar, is also attributed to 'Lipman of Prague' (ליפמן מפרגא). See London, British Library, MS Add. 18684 [IMHM F 4978], fol. 48r.

⁸See Václav Vladivoj Tomek, *Základy starého místopisu Pražského*, 4 vols (Praha: Královská česká společnost nauk, 1866–75), I (1866), p. 247. In 1407, Lipman (referred to as *magister Lypman judex* in municipal documents) and two other members of the community claimed communal ownership of five houses adjacent to the Old Jewish cemetery in the New Town's Broad Street (Široká, today Jungmannova). See Tomek, II (1870), 70.

⁹The poem found in some of the earliest manuscripts of the text was allegedly composed by Lipman's colleague at the rabbinic court in Prague, Avigdor Kara, to celebrate the completion of *Sefer Nizahon*. See Limor & Yuval, 'Skepticism and Conversion' (as in n. 5), p. 170. A version of this poem was published by Johann Christoph Wagenseil in his 'Correctiones

binic court, along with his colleagues and close friends Avigdor Kara (d. 1439) and Menaḥem ben Jacob Shalem, also known as Agler—the signatures of these three scholars appear together on a divorce document dated at Prague in 1413.¹⁰ But Lipman probably left the city soon afterwards and spent his last years in Erfurt, where he famously presided over a rabbinic synod, and died in 1421.¹¹ p. 122

Ironically, Bodeker studied at the university in Prague in 1408, so he could have met Lipman himself, perhaps strolling around the Old Town with a manuscript of his book.¹² Had such a chance meeting occurred, there is little reason to suppose that the esteemed rabbi and the young Christian student would have paid any attention to each other: in the imperial capital Christians rubbed shoulders with Jews on a regular basis.¹³ For Bodeker and many Christian Hebraists who followed him in condemning *Sefer Nizāḥon*, far more important than Lipman himself was the dangerous tool of anti-Christian polemic he authored.¹⁴

Lipmannianae', printed as an appendix to his *Sota: Hoc est: Liber mischnicus de uxore adulterii suspecta* (Altdorf: Schönersterstedt, 1674), p. 80, of which a digitized copy is available at nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10621182-0.

¹⁰London, Montefiore Library, MS 156 [IMHM F 7306], fols 71r–72r; see also Hartwig Hirschfeld, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew MSS. of the Montefiore Library* (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 45. On the surviving correspondence attesting to the close relationship between Avigdor Kara and Menaḥem Agler, see Frank Talmage, 'From the Writings of R. Avigdor Kara and R. Menaḥem Shalem', in *Thought and Action: Essays in Memory of Simon Rawidowicz on the 25th Anniversary of his Death*, ed. by Alfred Abraham Greenbaum and Alfred L. Ivry (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1983), pp. 43–51 (in Hebrew); also published in English in his *Apples of Gold* (as in n. 5), pp. 386–99. An unidentified letter written by Shalem/Agler to Lipman Mühlhausen is mentioned in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 585 [IMHM F 17390], fol. 78v (וּכֵן יֵשׁ בְּיָדִי מִכְתָּב שֶׁכָּתַב מֵה"ר מִנְחֵם אֶגְלֵר ז"ל לְמֵה"ר לִימָן [כָּד!], מוֹלֵהוּן ז"ל), see further below, n. 66.

¹¹Israel Jacob Yuval, *Scholars in their Time: The Religious Leadership of German Jewry in the Late Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1988), pp. 152–56 (in Hebrew). On the date of his death, see *ibid.*, p. 106.

¹²Wigger, *Stephan Bodeker* (as in n. 1), pp. 2–6.

¹³On spatial proximity of Jews and Christians in medieval Prague, see, for instance, Alexandr Putík, 'On the Topography and Demography of the Prague Jewish Town Prior to the Pogrom of 1389', *Judaica Bohemiae*, 30–31 (1994–95), 7–46; Martin Musilek, 'Patrons, Clients, and Relatives: The Social World of the Old Town Prague in the 14th Century' (unpublished PhD thesis, Charles University, Prague, 2014), pp. 106–20 (in Czech).

¹⁴On the reception of *Sefer Nizāḥon* among Christian Hebraists in the early modern era, see Limor & Yuval, 'Skepticism and Conversion' (as in n. 5), p. 166.

Arguments against Christianity indeed feature prominently in Lipman's book. Its title echoes an earlier Ashkenazic compendium of anti-Christian polemic that was re-named *Sefer Nizahon Yashan* by the Christian Hebraist Johann Christoph Wagenseil (1633–1705) in order to distinguish it from Lipman's well-known treatise.¹⁵ Like its thirteenth-century namesake, the structure of Lipman's book follows the order of the books of the Bible, tackling on its way the classical *topoi* of Christological exegesis. Furthermore, Lipman concluded his work with a report of a debate held with a Jewish apostate called Pesah or Peter.¹⁶ In addition to this polemical encounter with a convert to Christianity, Lipman mentions debates he held with Christian clerics: the Franciscan provincial and theologian Marquard of Lindau (d. 1392), as well as an unnamed priest with whom he discussed the merits of the First and the Second Temples.¹⁷ p. 123

Despite the important place assigned to arguments against Christianity in *Sefer Nizahon*, in what follows, I shall argue that inter-religious polemic constitutes only one facet of a much broader project embodied by the book's structure and content. Lipman's primary aim in his book was to popularise among wider strata of Ashkenazic society a rationalistic reinterpretation of the Jew-

¹⁵For a modern edition and translation, see David Berger (ed.), *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizḥaḥon Vetus with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979). On the use of the New Testament in *Sefer Nizahon Yashan* and for its comparison with earlier Hebrew polemical treatises, see more recently Christopher Ochs, *Matthaeus Adversus Christianos: The Use of the Gospel of Matthew in Jewish Polemics against the Divinity of Jesus*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*, II/350 (Tübingen: Mohr, 2013), pp. 167–207.

¹⁶Yom Ṭov Lipman Mühlhausen, *Sefer Nizahon*, ed. by Theodor Hackspan (Altdorf-Nuremberg: Endterus, 1644), no. 447, pp. 191–92. Hackspan's printing (henceforth SN) remains the most easily accessible edition of the book (cf. the digitized copy online at <[urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10832057-6](http://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10832057-6)>), albeit one containing numerous minor errors. A critical edition based at least on the most important manuscripts therefore remains a *desideratum*. Where necessary, I have consulted two fifteenth-century manuscripts of *Sefer Nizahon* (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Cod. hebr. 107 [IMHM F 1189], henceforth M1; *ibid.*, MS Cod. hebr. 423 [IMHM F 1256], henceforth M2) to produce better readings. Both manuscripts are accessible online, at <[urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00034081-7](http://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00034081-7)> and <[urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00026278-4](http://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00026278-4)>, respectively.

¹⁷For the discussions with 'the head priest of Lindau' (ראש כוהנים דלינדא), see SN, no. 179, p. 107; no. 225, p. 123; no. 290, p. 159. Israel Yuval's suggestion that this priest was Marquard of Lindau (Yuval, 'Kabbalisten, Ketzer und Polemiker', as in n. 5, p. 169; Limor & Yuval, 'Skepticism and Conversion', as in n. 5, p. 175) has been corroborated by the evidence provided by Stephen Mossman, *Marquard von Lindau and the Challenges of Religious Life in Late Medieval Germany: The Passion, the Eucharist, the Virgin Mary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 16–18. For the discussion with the unnamed priest, see SN, no. 260, p. 141.

ish religion. He chose to respond to what he perceived as the shortcomings of late-medieval Ashkenazic religiosity by fashioning Jewish identity as constructed primarily around belief based on carefully delineated theological principles. His project was heavily influenced by the philosophical writings of Maimonides, especially *The Guide of the Perplexed*, studied alongside the commentaries of Moses Narboni (d. c. 1362) and Solomon ben Judah ha-Naši, a little-known author who had introduced the study of the *Guide* to Ashkenaz only one generation before Lipman.¹⁸

The appropriation of Maimonidean philosophy enabled Lipman to explore the motif of intellectual diversity in Ashkenazic discourse in a new light.¹⁹ It offered tools to channel and control various approaches to tradition by subduing them to the supreme authority of rational scrutiny. As we shall see, Lipman carefully distinguished between different classes of opponents to this project, invoked as rhetorical interlocutors. It seems that by imagining and classifying heterodoxy in the midst of Judaism, Lipman sought to prepare the way for the triumph of orthodoxy, which would ultimately lead to messianic redemption. More tentatively, I suggest that Lipman articulated the need for rational reappraisal of Jewish tradition in a manner that echoed some aspects of contemporary Christian theological discourse—its calls for religious reform, its preoccupations with the dissemination of theological knowledge among the laity, and its interest in marking out orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

p. 124

¹⁸On the study of philosophy in Ashkenaz in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Ephraim Kupfer, 'Li-demutah ha-tarbut shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-hakhmeiha be-me'ot ha-14–15', *Tarbiz*, 42 (1973), 113–47 (in Hebrew); Joseph M. Davis, 'Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism: The Evidence of "Sefer Hadrat Qodesh"', *AJS Review*, 18 (1993), 195–222; Tamás Visi, 'The Emergence of Philosophy in Ashkenazic Contexts: The Case of Czech Lands in the Early Fifteenth Century', *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, 8 (2009), 213–43; id., 'On the Peripheries of Ashkenaz: Medieval Jewish Philosophers in Normandy and in the Czech Lands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century' (unpublished habilitation thesis, Palacký University, Olomouc, 2011), pp. 158–233. The only systematic treatment of Solomon ben Judah ha-Naši's commentary to date remains Michael Zvi Nehorai, 'R. Shlomo bar Yuda ha-Nasi u-ferusho le-Moreh ha-nevukhim' (unpublished PhD thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1978) (in Hebrew).

¹⁹On earlier approaches to multiple truths in Torah study and multidisciplinary among Ashkenazic Tosafists, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, 'Torah Study and Truth in Medieval Ashkenazic Rabbinic Literature and Thought', in *Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought*, ed. by Howard Kreisel (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2006), pp. 101–19; id., *The Intellectual History and Rabbinic Culture of Medieval Ashkenaz* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), pp. 26–35.

II

In the introduction to *Sefer Nizahon*, Lipman proclaimed his intention of defending the Jewish faith against four groups of opponents.²⁰ He described them using the imagery of the ‘four sons’ that appears in the Passover Haggadah: the wise son (*hakham*), the wicked son (*rasha*), the simple-minded son (*tam*), and the son who does not know how to ask (*she-eino yode’a li-sh’ol*). p. 125

[T]here are among us well-educated wise men who do not take into consideration the [deeper] understanding of our faith {and they should learn it}. There are also wicked people, sceptics, both circumcised and uncircumcised, who speculate about the decrees of the Lord Blessed be He and about his prophets and the pious; also the Sadducees who disregard {the words of} our rabbis of blessed memory. Furthermore, there are simple-minded people who reduce all commandments of the Lord Blessed be He to law and decree and do not try to grasp their {deeper} reasons; they explain all the words of the rabbis of blessed memory according to their literal sense and make the impossible possible. And there are Christians who do not even know how to ask, as it shall become clear in several instances in this text.²¹

The variety of polemical targets of *Sefer Nizahon* is also imprinted in the structure of the book. It is divided into 354 sections, one for each day of the Jewish lunar year. These sections follow the order of the books of the Bible, but they are also further arranged into seven groups—one for each day of the week—devoted to specific arguments raised against the Jewish faith.²² Thus, the first day is dedicated to the refutation of Christological exegesis. For the second day and third day, Lipman attempts to tackle broader exegetical problems and offers his own interpretation of some misleading Biblical verses. On the fourth day, Lipman explains the reasons for some commandments. The fifth day is devoted to arguments against those who speculate about the Bible and mock the Talmud, while for the sixth day he brings forth arguments against heretics and Sadducees, who disregard the words of the rabbis in the Talmud—these

²⁰SN, Introduction.

²¹SN, Introduction; M1, fol. 102v; cf. M2, fol. 9v. The text in curly brackets appears in the manuscripts, but not in Hackspan’s edition.

²²On the structure of the book, see further below.

are later explicitly identified as Karaites.²³ Finally, for the Sabbath, Lipman p. 126 presents an exposition of basic theological principles that is similar, but not identical to, the famous thirteen principles laid down by Maimonides.²⁴

In these programmatic statements, Lipman styled himself as a father instructing his children at the *seder* table, and identified the challenges of intellectual diversity facing Ashkenazic Jewry of his time. In addition to addressing external threats to the Jewish faith, his aim in *Sefer Niṣṣaḥon* was to challenge the intellectual isolationism of Ashkenazic rabbinic elites and unreflective, literal approaches to religious tradition. Throughout his work, Lipman repeatedly bemoaned the lack of intellectual sophistication among Ashkenazic scholars, who showed little interest in understanding anything beyond practical *Halakhah*. Commenting on the verse ‘They that handle the law knew me not’ (Jer 2:8), Lipman lamented that

not all sages [of the past] were erudite, not even in [the knowledge of] the verses of the Torah. It is for this reason that we find in the writings of some *ge'onim* that they were not able to reconcile what they had received with what they thought [was correct]. This is all the more so in this destitute era of ours, because there is almost²⁵ no one who would take it to heart that it is not enough to study only

²³*SN*, no. 62, pp. 39–40. In his *Commentary on Job*, Lipman also claimed that the work’s composition was motivated by the ‘blindness of Karaites’ (והנה עיורון הקראי [עוררני להסיר] ולבאר המסוה), cf. Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, MS Kaufmann A259 [IMHM F 14557], p. 219. Lipman’s apparent need to engage with Karaism has caused some perplexity, given the absence of Karaite communities in late-medieval Ashkenaz (see Kaufmann, *Lipman Mühlhausen*, as in n. 5, pp. 58–59). As already noted by Talmage (‘Sefer Ha-Niṣṣaḥon’, as in n. 5, p. 345), Lipman’s knowledge of Karaism seems to have been derived primarily from earlier authorities. He cites Maimonides (*SN*, no. 53, p. 31; no. 68, p. 42), Ibn Ezra (*SN*, no. 82, pp. 52–53 [the reference to Karaites is absent in Hackspan’s edition, but cf. M1, no. 81, fol. 133r; M2, no. 81, fol. 45r]) and Meshulam ben Qalonymos (*SN*, no. 66, p. 41; no. 123, p. 74 [the reference is corrupted in Hackspan’s edition]). On the latter’s responses to Karaites and their incorporation into Ashkenazic halakhic literature, see Aron Freimann, ‘Meschullam b. Kalonymos’ Polemik gegen die Karäer, in *Judaica: Festschrift zu Hermann Cohens siebenzigstem Geburtstage* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1912), pp. 569–78. The main target of Lipman’s polemic is the Karaites’ literal exegesis of the Bible and their rejection of oral tradition, themes which fit very well with the overall emphasis of his book.

²⁴Lipman includes the belief in *creatio ex nihilo*, the exodus from Egypt, God’s unchangeability and retribution after death. For a comparison of Lipman’s and Maimonides’s lists of basic principles, see Talmage, ‘Sefer Ha-Niṣṣaḥon’ (as in n. 5), pp. 335–37.

²⁵This word does not appear in Hackspan’s edition.

dietary laws and the remaining corporeal commandments without the knowledge of the Blessed One.²⁶

Lipman is obviously alluding to the popularity of late-medieval halakhic compendia summarising the laws of *kashrut* and household rules, aimed at a wider, non-specialist audience.²⁷ But even among scholars who were engaged in disciplines beyond *Halakhah*, such as esoteric lore, Lipman struggled to find someone able to interpret rationally the problematic elements of the tradition. An eager student of Kabbalah, he nevertheless complained in his *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*: p. 127

I saw many different commentaries [on *Sefer Yeẓirah*], yet I could not find a Kabbalist who would be able to explain it to me orally and bring the plain meaning of the book in line with the Kabbalistic wisdom that we possess, remove its inconsistencies and make it compatible with reason.²⁸

For Lipman, then, reconciling difference was seen as a task of overcoming problematic diversity by means of reason. He consistently criticized those members of the Jewish community who failed to grasp the rational basis of the commandments, and highlighted the simple-mindedness of their insistence on literal exegesis of the Talmudic *aggadah*. The term he used to refer to this group—simple-minded people (*tamim*)—was probably inspired not only by the Passover Haggadah, but also by the writings of the thirteenth-century Tosafist Moses Taḳu.

Taḳu wrote a polemical work, *Ketav Tamim*, in which he advocated a literal exegesis of Talmudic *aggadah* and denounced the philosophical approach of Sa'adya Gaon as well as the esoteric doctrines of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.²⁹ His trea-

²⁶הרי שאין כל החכמים היו בקיאים אף בפסוקי התורה לכן הבננו מתוך דברי מקצת גאוני שלא ידעו לאמת המקובלות כפי דעתם. ומכ"ש בדורינו העני שכמעט אין מי ששם ללב אשר אין די בלמידת [בכה"י: כל מידת] תורת האסור והמותר ושאר מצות הנוהגות גופניות לבד בלתי ידיעת ה"י [SN, no. 124, p. 75. I have amended the text according to M1, fols 143v–144r.

²⁷On these halakhic handbooks, see Israel M. Ta-Shma, 'Professional Halakhic Literature in Ashkenaz', in id., *Ritual, Custom and Reality in Franco-Germany, 1000–1350* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996), pp. 94–111 (in Hebrew).

²⁸Israel Weinstock, 'Perush Sefer yeẓirah le-R. Yom Ṭov Lipman Mühlhausen', *Ṭemirin*, 2 (1981), 93–121, at p. 103.

²⁹On Taḳu, see Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Tosafists: Their History, Writings and Methods*, 5th edn, 2 pts (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1986), I, pp. 420–25 (in Hebrew); Joseph Dan, introduction to the facsimile edition, *R. Moshe Taḳu, Ketav tamim: 13th Century Controversy*

tise is preserved in a single manuscript, yet it was not unknown to Ashkenazic scholars interested in the interpretation of Talmudic *aggadah*, and the problem of anthropomorphism in particular. It was discussed in the correspondence between Abraham Klausner (d. c. 1407), a leading Austrian rabbi, and Menaḥem Agler, who is identical with Menaḥem ben Jacob Shalem, Lipman's colleague at the rabbinic court of Prague and a proponent of Maimonidean philosophy.³⁰ Agler described Taḳu in the letter to Klausner as a simple man misled by the literal sense of Talmudic *aggadah*:

p. 128

The author of *Ketav Tamim* was a simple man: he 'walked in innocence',³¹ did not seek great [things] and did not walk after wonderful [things].³² He filled his belly with bread and meat³³ and 'cared for the honour of his Maker'.³⁴ The fool put on his 'double

over Saadian Theology, MS Paris H711 (Jerusalem: Dinur, 1984), pp. 7–27 (in Hebrew); id., 'Ashkenazi Hasidism and the Maimonidean Controversy', ed. by Arthur Hyman, *Maimonidean Studies*, 3 (1992), 29–47, at pp. 41–46; Joseph Dan, *Toldot torat ha-sod ha-ivrit*, 9 vols (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2008–13), V (2011), pp. 455–81. Excerpts from *Ketav Tamim* were published by Raphael Kirchheim in *Ozar nehmad*, 3 (1860), 58–99.

³⁰On the letter, see Kupfer, 'Li-demutah ha-tarbutit' (as in n. 18), pp. 114–17, 134–46. We possess very little information about Menaḥem ben Jacob Shalem, who is sometimes erroneously identified as Avigdor Kara's (half-)brother. His remark in the letter to Klausner that in his youth he heard Taḳu's book being described as *Ketav tame'* ('The Unclean Writing') (Kupfer, *ibid.*, p. 137) suggests that he was of Ashkenazic origin or at least spent his youth in an area where this obscure Ashkenazic text would have been accessible. On his possible connections with the Land of Israel, see Davis, 'Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis' (as in n. 18), p. 201, n. 23; David Berger, 'Judaism and General Culture in Medieval and Early Modern Times', in *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration?*, ed. by Jacob J. Schacter (Northvale, NJ, and Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, 1997), pp. 57–141, at p. 122, n. 113; Yuval, *Scholars in their Time* (as in n. 11), pp. 300–01. However, his father's sobriquet, 'Shalem', could also be a reference to Gn 33:18, or an allusion to his ambition to become a 'complete man' (האיש השלם in Samuel ibn Tibbon's translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed*) with an intellect completely unified with God. Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 3:51. The possibility that Jacob Shalem was identical with Jacob ben Samuel, the addressee of Solomon ben Judah ha-Naši's commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, should be considered as well. See also my 'Difference and Intellectual Diversity' (as in n. *), pp. 30–33.

³¹Prov 20:7.

³²Cf. Ps 131:1.

³³The image is used by Maimonides to describe the knowledge of ritual precepts and other commandments, a necessary precondition for metaphysical speculation. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot yesodei ha-Torah 4:13.

³⁴bHag 14a.

bridle³⁵ and he rejoiced in the literal sense of *aggadot* and believed only the words of the [Talmudic] scholars and their riddles. He put his thoughts into his sheath,³⁶ he sat inside his house as he had been accustomed to do from his young age. He did not go out of his tent, did not yearn for the smell of the field. He only walked on ‘the way of the King’³⁷ trodden by the multitude and his heart was not tempted [to follow] ‘the way to the vineyards’.³⁸ Therefore the literal meanings of the *aggadot* misled him and he uttered this great slander. He and those who follow him have no remedy for such failure.³⁹

Agler’s description of Taḳu is heavily indebted to the polemical letter *Ketav ha-Hitnaḥlut* written around 1305 by Yedaiah ben Abraham ha-Penini of Béziers (d. c. 1340) to Solomon ibn Adret (1235–1310), the head of the Jewish community in Barcelona.⁴⁰ In this letter, Yedaiah tried to persuade Ibn Adret, who had just issued a ban on the study of philosophy for all men under the age of twenty-five, of the necessity of philosophical education and defended vigorously the achievements of Jewish philosophical culture in Provence, contrasting it with the traditional religious ideals held by Ibn Adret and his followers.⁴¹ Images and expressions used by Yedaiah to describe this ideal were later applied by Agler to Moses Taḳu. Agler’s acquaintance with the exchange between Yedaiah ha-Penini and Ibn Adret indicates that he was well aware of the controversies that had surrounded the dissemination of philosophy in the past.⁴² In order to stifle potential criticism and present philosophy as a legitimate pursuit, he appropriated the subtle polemical rhetoric against traditionalism from Yedaiah’s letter and applied it to the Ashkenazic context.

³⁵Job 30:11.

³⁶Cf. 1 Chr 21:27.

³⁷Cf. Nu 20:17.

³⁸Cf. Job 31:9.

³⁹Kupfer, ‘Li-demutah ha-tarbutit’ (as in n. 18), pp. 136–37.

⁴⁰On the letter, see Abraham S. Halkin, ‘Yedaiah Bedershi’s “Apology”’, in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. by Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 165–84.

⁴¹Solomon ibn Adret, *Responsa* (Venice: Giustiniani, 1545), fols 67r–75v (no. 418).

⁴²It is significant that the correspondence between Agler and Klausner and Yedaiah’s letter can be found in the same manuscript, copied in 1474 by a scribe named Ben-Zion ben Raphael. See Parma, Bibliotheca Palatina, MS Cod. Parm. 2478 (De Rossi 755) [IMHM F 13482], fols 153v–169v.

Like Lipman, Menaḥem Agler contrasted blind adherence to tradition and to literal exegesis with a rational approach to faith. However, a literalist attitude was for him not the hallmark of Halakhists. In another letter most likely written by Agler to one of his students struggling to reconcile mystical traditions with philosophy, he criticized some adherents of Kabbalah who

are not willing to put [their teachings] aside even if the literal interpretation of their exoteric meaning has to be dismissed by every rational being, even at first thought. Rather, they say that [the belief in] such [absurd] notions will not do them any harm, claiming that this is how they have been received, orally from Kabbalist to Kabbalist, generation after generation. They say that about [such an attitude] it is written: ‘You shall be simple (*tamim*) in front of the Lord, your God.’⁴³ They consider it a great perfection and it is the highest advantage according to their way of thinking. They consider [Kabbalistic books] to be a part of the wisdom of the Torah. But the truth becomes clear [only] after due deliberation.⁴⁴

p. 130

For Agler, such an attitude was unacceptable. In his opinion, the word *tamim* should be understood as ‘whole’, rather than simple—a wholeness that is associated with the knowledge of truth achieved through philosophical study alone. As he put it in a gloss preserved in a manuscript of the *Guide of the Perplexed*:

It is a religious commandment for all [to study the doctrine of Divine attributes] according to one’s capabilities, because it is written: ‘You shall be whole (*tamim*) in front of the Lord, your God.’ One becomes whole and complete (*shalem*) only through the knowledge of truth and not through mere belief.⁴⁵

Lipman’s criticism of the perceived narrow-mindedness of Ashkenazic scholars and of literalism echoes elements of Sephardic critique of Ashkenazic culture. Lipman’s predecessor, Solomon ben Judah ha-Naši, who probably immigrated to Ashkenaz from southern France or Italy, decided to reveal ‘the secrets of the *Guide*’ in written form in the late 1380s and early 1390s, because he saw that

⁴³Dt 18:13.

⁴⁴Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Mich. Add. 25 [IMHM F 20970], fols 66v–67r. I discuss the contents of this anonymous letter and arguments in favour of Menaḥem Agler’s authorship in detail in ‘Difference and Intellectual Diversity’ (as in n. *), pp. 122–26.

⁴⁵St Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, MS C 47 [IMHM F 69303], fol. 40v.

his contemporaries ‘believe in [God’s] corporeality and do not believe in [his] unity properly.’⁴⁶ Similarly, the anonymous author of *Sefer ‘Alilot Devarim*, p. 131 possibly a Spanish Jew writing in Italy in the second half of the fourteenth century, accused Ashkenazic Jews of hampering the advent of redemption by ignoring philosophy and logic and by focusing solely on the study of the Talmud.⁴⁷ For Lipman, too, neglect of philosophical education had no less than cosmic consequences. Philosophical naïveté and literalism render prayers useless because they lack the correct intention. Here, Lipman clad the focus on the intentional element of prayer (*kavanah*), so crucial in the doctrine of *Ḥasidei Ashkenaz* and in later Kabbalah, in a philosophical garb. To tackle this issue, Lipman dedicated a short treatise, *Kavanat ha-Tefilah* (*The Intention of Prayer*), to the subject.⁴⁸ There, he offered a description of the problem posed by anthropomorphism in prayer:

Our ancestors, the *aharonim*,⁴⁹ employed anthropomorphism and [positive] attributes abundantly in the prayers [they composed]. As a result of the stupidity of this completely lawless generation, [these expressions] spread to most parts of our diaspora. We do not know what to do, since it is impossible to separate ourselves from the community and we have to accept the libations of the uneducated, although their clothes transmit impurity, lest each one build their own place of idolatrous worship. [...] But it is [also] impossible to bind oneself with those who walk in darkness and to pray these words according to their intention, for I do not want to force myself to speak improperly. Therefore I shall write down the rules according to which the intelligent will be able to expound all [problematic expressions] according to the way of truth and make

⁴⁶Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 393, fol. 9v. Solomon’s name suggests that he might have been a member of the important ha-Naši family from Narbonne, a city with a long tradition of philosophical study. However, Yom Ṭov Lipman Mühlhausen refers to Solomon as ‘rabbi Solomon Lo’azi’, a sobriquet commonly used for Jews arriving to Ashkenaz from Italy. See Nehorai, ‘R. Shlomo bar Yuda ha-Nasi’ (as in n. 18), p. 5.

⁴⁷*Sefer ‘Alilot Devarim*, *Oẓar neḥmad*, 4 (1864), 179–214. On its origin, see Israel M. Ta-Shma, ‘Heikhan niṭhaber Sefer “‘alilot-devarim”?’’, *‘Aleī sefer*, 3 (1976), 44–53 (in Hebrew); Reuven Bonfil, ‘Sefer ‘alilot devarim—Perek be-toldot ha-hagut ha-yehudit be-me’ah ha-arba’ ‘esreh’, *Eshel Be’er Sheva’*, 2 (1980), 229–64 (in Hebrew).

⁴⁸Published by Kaufmann, *Lipman Mühlhausen* (as in n. 5), pp. 178–90.

⁴⁹Lipman refers to post-Talmudic sages. On the development of terminological distinction between *rishonim* and *aharonim*, see Israel J. Yuval, ‘Rishonim and Aharonim, Antiqui et Moderni (Periodization and Self-Awareness in Ashkenaz)’, *Zion*, 57 (1992), 369–94 (in Hebrew).

them acceptable. Then, even though the explicit reading is not entirely correct, the intention will be right, and ‘the Merciful One desires the heart’ [bSan 106b].⁵⁰

Like the author of *Sefer ‘Alilot Devarim*, Lipman believed that a lack of philosophical education prolongs Jewish exile. In his commentary on the first four chapters of *Mishneh Torah*, he complained: p. 132

I saw that some high-handed people mock God’s attributes and consider them only of secondary importance [...]. Would that it became clear to them that they hamper our redemption and render our prayer void! If it weren’t for these scoffers, the [knowledge of] God’s unity would grow in Israel and so would [proper] concentration in prayer, and the redemption would be close, as it is written: ‘Because he knows my name, I will answer him when he calls to me.’⁵¹ But if one does not know to whom he calls, who will answer him? It is as if someone needed Simon and called for Reuben—such a man will never obtain what he desires.⁵²

The rigour of Lipman’s and Agler’s polemic against literalism and anthropomorphism should not, however, be taken as evidence that these attitudes were widely accepted in Ashkenazic culture. At least among rabbinic elites, Taḳu’s extreme literalism seems to have been exceptional. Recent studies published by Ephraim Kanarfogel have shown convincingly that Ashkenazic Tosafists employed a wide range of interpretative approaches to Biblical and Talmudic anthropomorphism.⁵³ After the fourteenth century, it seems that the al- p. 133

⁵⁰Kaufmann, *Lipman Mühlhausen* (as in n. 5), p. 182. The Talmudic dictum ‘the Merciful One desires the heart’ is also invoked by Lipman in his introduction to *Sefer Nizahon*, employed in a similar manner to diminish the unsettling quality of apparent intellectual difference: אל יאשימני המוצא בספר הנצחון הזה פירושים שחדשתי אשר רבותי ז”ל מפרשים מקצתם בדרכים אחרים. גם התורה נדרשת בכמה פנים [...] ורחמנא ליבא בעי M2, fols 9v–10r; cf. M1, fol. 103r.

⁵¹Ps 91:15–16.

⁵²Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 393 [IMHM F 16311], fols 154r–v. The commentary has recently been published in Shlomo Gottesman, ‘The Commentary on the First Four Chapters of the “Book of Knowledge” by Yom Ṭov Lipman Mühlhausen’ (in Hebrew), in *Yeshurun: Me’asef Torani* (New York & Jerusalem: Mekhon Yeshurun, 2010), pp. 70–98. On Lipman’s authorship, see Ephraim Kupfer, ‘Sefer ha-Berit and Other Writings of Rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipman Mühlhausen’, *Sinai*, 56 (1965), 330–43 (in Hebrew), at p. 332.

⁵³Ephraim Kanarfogel, ‘Varieties of Belief in Medieval Ashkenaz: The Case of Anthropomorphism’, in *Rabbinic Culture and Its Critics; Jewish Authority, Dissent, and Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, ed. by Daniel Frank and Matt Goldish (Detroit: Wayne State Univer-

legorical interpretation of the *aggadah* was no longer problematic for Ashkenazic rabbis.⁵⁴ Anthropomorphism and aggadic literalism were perhaps more widespread among second-level intellectuals and less-learned strata of Jewish society, although their prevalence is very hard to assess given our lack of sources.⁵⁵

As we have seen, Lipman's and Agler's criticism was aimed at prominent rabbis, second-level intellectuals interested in Kabbalah, and the uneducated alike. Rather than referring to a specific social group or intellectual current, it is therefore more likely that for Lipman, Taḳu and other '*tamim*' represent Jews clinging to received, unreflective faith, with stifling effects on religious life. In his *Commentary on Job*, Lipman explained that Job is called *tam we-yashar*—simple and upright—because he lacked wisdom and obeyed God's commandments 'out of fear and not out of love, which is the purpose of wisdom'.⁵⁶ Like the biblical Job, those blinded by formalism and lack of wisdom cannot make sense of the tragedies that befall them. Lipman presented his work as a remedy to this situation and as an itinerary leading to the love of God.

III

If unreflective faith based on mindlessly received tradition was, for Lipman, potentially harmful, unbridled speculation was for him no less dangerous. This is illustrated in his polemic against a group of 'sceptics' who doubt or speculate (*meharherim*) about God's decrees and who are included in the category of 'wicked people'. Lipman's ambiguous definition has provided ample opportunity for speculation about the identity of this group. It has been suggested that they could be members of the younger generation, who 'realized the cultural [and intellectual] superiority of Christianity over the closed technical Judaism' they knew.⁵⁷ However, Lipman explicitly claimed that this category included non-Jews as well as Jews. He also referred to these sceptics as 'abominable

sity Press, 2008), pp. 117–59; id., 'Anthropomorphism and Rationalist Modes of Thought in Medieval Ashkenaz: The Case of R. Yosef Bekhor Shor', *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, 8 (2009), 119–38; id., *Intellectual History* (as in n. 19), pp. 490–529.

⁵⁴Davis, 'Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis' (as in n. 18), pp. 218–20.

⁵⁵Kanarfogel, *Intellectual History* (as in n. 19), p. 527.

⁵⁶Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, MS Kaufmann A259 [IMHM F 14557], p. 219.

⁵⁷Limor & Yuval, 'Skepticism and Conversion' (as in n. 5), p. 173.

crawling serpents', thus highlighting their ritually impure and essentially un-Jewish character.

A survey of the sections in *Sefer Nizahon* dedicated to the arguments of *meharherim* and of instances where this term is employed suggests that Lipman used the term to refer to speculation about the literal meaning of biblical and Talmudic texts in general, often with philosophical ideas in the background. Among the issues discussed in the sections dedicated to the objections of *meharherim* are biblical verses that suggest God is subject to change,⁵⁸ that seem to set limits to his knowledge and providence,⁵⁹ or passages where he seems to tempt, deceive, cause sin or evil.⁶⁰ His justice and accessibility to prayer are also debated.⁶¹ Some sections also address the problem of the length of Jewish exile and messianic hope.⁶² Occasionally, the term *le-harher* is also used to describe what seems to be popular speculation, as in the section (not assigned to a specific day) discussing the question of why the world is not larger than it is, if God is omnipotent.⁶³ p. 134

While some of these issues could have also been raised by Christians in order to stress the inferiority of Judaism, most of them are problematic from Christian as well as Jewish points of view.⁶⁴ Their significance lay in the fact that they resulted from speculative thought and that they contradicted basic theological principles of Judaism. Not necessarily referring to a specific group, I believe these speculators were created by Lipman in order to personify heresy, to highlight the dangers of unrestrained philosophical and theological speculation and to inculcate in his readers the basic theological principles promoted throughout the book.⁶⁵ This of course does not preclude the possibility that radical

⁵⁸SN, no. 16, pp. 17–18 (Gn 11:7); no. 26, p. 21 (Gn 22:12).

⁵⁹SN, no. 27, p. 21 (Gn 22:12); no. 50, p. 29 (Ex 4:8); no. 325, p. 179 (Lam 3:36).

⁶⁰SN, no. 25, p. 21 (Gn 22:1); no. 129, p. 84 (Dt 8:2); no. 159, p. 103 (Jgs 2:20); no. 184, p. 108 (2 Sm 12:11); no. 186, p. 109 (2 Sm 24:1); no. 193, p. 111 (1 Kgs 22:20); no. 296, pp. 163–64 (Job 1:8); no. 304, p. 168 (Job 42:8); no. 346, pp. 190–91 (2 Chr 32:31).

⁶¹SN, no. 54, pp. 33–34 (Ex 14:8); no. 167, p. 105 (1 Sm 2:33); no. 212, p. 118 (Ez 16:51); no. 249, p. 138 (Am 7:17); no. 316, p. 174 (Eccl 7:15); no. 327, p. 179 (Lam 3:44).

⁶²SN, no. 146, p. 97 (Dt 30:3); no. 237, p. 132 (Is 54:9); no. 342, p. 190 (1 Chr 23:25).

⁶³SN, no. 3, pp. 6–7 (Gn 1:1).

⁶⁴For responses to Christian anti-Jewish arguments included in the fifth section, see e.g. SN, no. 260, pp. 141–43 (Hg 2:9); no. 288, pp. 158–59 (Ps 92:6).

⁶⁵A similar conceptualization of heresy can be found in the roughly contemporary *Sefer Hadrat ha-Qodesh* by Simeon ben Samuel of Regensburg, who also understood heresy as the denial of one of the Thirteen Principles. See Joseph M. Davis, 'Drawing the Line: Views of

philosophical ideas were present in some form on the Ashkenazic intellectual horizon.⁶⁶ However, it is only much later that we encounter an unabashed religious sceptic like Eli'ezer Eilburg, who in his *Ten Questions* (*Eśer she'elot*), written probably in the late 1530s, openly criticized several central tenets of Jewish religion and the authority of the rabbis in a manner reminiscent of Lipman's *meharherim*.⁶⁷ p. 135

It is also possible that Lipman's concerns about speculation echo similar discussions which were taking place in contemporary Christian culture. Joseph Davis, Israel Yuval and Ora Limor, and Tamás Visi have already speculated about the possible influence of the university founded in Prague in 1347/48 on the emergence of Ashkenazic interest in philosophy.⁶⁸ I suggest that alongside making philosophy more readily available, contemporary Christian academic and theological discourses influenced the motivation of Jewish intellectuals to engage with philosophical ideas, and shaped the reception and presentation of these ideas in their works. The dissemination of speculative philosophy and theology cultivated at the universities, as well as of religious and social criticism in vernacular writings and preaching aimed at moral corruption and general lack of piety, had become a burning issue in Bohemia around the time of the

Jewish Heresy and Belief among Medieval and Early Modern Ashkenazic Jews', in *Rabbinic Culture and Its Critics* (as in n. 53), pp. 161–94, at p. 166.

⁶⁶A fragment of an anonymous letter from the first half of the fifteenth century, written by a disillusioned student of philosophy who cites the correspondence between Lipman and Shalem as well as the works of Maimonides, Gersonides's *Milhamot ha-Shem*, and *Ruah Hen*, is preserved in an Ashkenazic manuscript now in Oxford. The author criticizes the view that salvation can be attained through philosophical study and attachment to the Active Intellect only, and complains about its pernicious influence on religious practice: 'It seems to me that the majority or all those I saw in my life who occupy themselves with [the study of] philosophy put aside the study and practice of the commandments' (ובמדומ' שהם הם רוב או כל אותם שראיתי) (מימי מתעסקי בחכמ' הפילוסופ' ומניחי לימוד וקיום המצות). Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 585 [IMHM F 17390], fols 78v–81r (here fol. 78v). On the letter, see Kupfer, 'Li-demutah ha-tarbutit' (as in n. 18), pp. 132–34; Visi, 'On the Peripheries of Ashkenaz' (as in n. 18), pp. 198–203, 232–33.

⁶⁷On Eilburg and his work, see Joseph M. Davis, 'The Ten Questions of Eliezer Eilburg and the Problem of Jewish Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century', *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 91 (2001), 293–336; Tamás Visi, 'Die Rebellion des Elieser Eilburg gegen die rabbinische Tradition', *Judaica Bohemiae*, 46 — Supplementum (2011), 11–32.

⁶⁸See Davis, 'Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis' (as in n. 18), p. 210; Limor & Yuval, 'Skepticism and Conversion' (as in n. 5), p. 173; Visi, 'Emergence of Philosophy' (as in n. 18), pp. 227–29.

composition of *Sefer Nizḥon*.⁶⁹ After 1400, in the light of growing social and political tensions in Prague, charges of academic heresy against Czech scholars acquired new and powerful meanings beyond the academia.⁷⁰ The controversies surrounding the teachings of Hus and his associates, very much like contemporary conflicts concerning Wycliffism and Lollardy in England, exposed growing anxieties about the disintegration of academic language and its potential to scandalize and mislead the public once it entered the unregulated sphere of public discourse.⁷¹ The academic responsibilities of university masters came into conflict with their pastoral ones as the words of divine revelation, their meanings, and the authority to interpret these meanings became contested issues, debated outside the sphere of technical theological discourse, in Latin and in the vernacular. Ultimately, discussions of pedagogy and hermeneutics could animate social and intellectual dissent as well as bolster religious orthodoxy.⁷² p. 136

We need not suggest that Lipman was directly influenced by Christian theological discourse. Rather, I propose that a concern with orthodox and heterodox identities and with the integration of theological knowledge and lay piety, stimulated by the circulation of Christian reform discourse in the vernacular, might have facilitated the reception of Maimonidean ideas concerning heresy and the importance of correct belief among Jews in Prague. Without postu-

⁶⁹On the intellectual milieu of pre-Hussite Prague, see Olivier Marin, *L'archevêque, le maître et le dévot: genèses du mouvement réformateur pragois, années 1360–1419*, Études d'histoire médiévale, 9 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005). On reform preaching in Bohemia, see Pavel Soukup, *Reformní kazatelství a Jakoubek ze Stříbra* (Praha: Filosofia, 2011), pp. 25–120. On Hus's vernacular writings as a new form of political communication, see Pavlína Rychterová, 'Theology Goes to the Vernaculars: Jan Hus, "On Simony", and the Practice of Translation in Fifteenth-Century Bohemia', in *Religious Controversy in Europe, 1378–1536: Textual Transmission and Networks of Readership*, ed. by Michael Van Dussen and Pavel Soukup (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 231–49.

⁷⁰On these issues, see most recently Martin Nodl, *Dekret kutnohorský* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2010), pp. 147–80.

⁷¹For an analysis of Wycliffism and Lollardy in the context of late-medieval scholastic discourse, see Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 45 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 209–16; id., 'Wycliffite "Affiliations": Some Intellectual-Historical Perspectives', in *Wycliffite Controversies*, ed. by Mishtooni C. A. Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck II (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 13–32, at pp. 13–18; id., 'University-Learning, Theological Method and Heresy in Fifteenth-Century England', in *Religious Controversy in Europe* (as in n. 69), pp. 289–313.

⁷²For a discussion of the role of pedagogy in Lollardy, see Rita Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 44 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

lating a direct causal relationship, it appears that these widely publicized external developments created a common ‘sphere of understanding’ and sensitized Lipman to the problematic positions of anthropomorphism, literalism, and unregulated speculation in Ashkenazic religious discourse. They also might have shaped his search for a hermeneutic authority which could reconcile and establish the correct meanings of contested elements of religious tradition. Having found such an authority in Maimonidean philosophy, Lipman appropriated the Maimonidean-Tibbonide conceptualization of Judaism as a philosophical religion.⁷³ Read this way, Lipman’s classification of polemical opponents can be seen as a way of buttressing his project of re-imagining the Jewish community along intellectual lines. The typology proposed by Lipman is constructive—it helps to create an image of the Jewish community moulded by rationalism and defined vis-à-vis the heterodox ‘other’. As a result, Lipman’s religious critique brings about a re-definition of communal boundaries and Jewish identity. p. 137

This process can be seen in Lipman’s commentary on the verse ‘Every male among you shall be circumcised’ (Gn 17:10), in *Sefer Nizḥon*:

The Christians mocked us, saying: ‘Women are legally not Jewish, because they are not circumcised.’ They do not know that faith does not depend on circumcision but rather on the heart. Indeed, circumcision does not make one a Jew, if he does not believe properly. And he who believes properly is a Jew even if uncircumcised—he merely transgresses one commandment [i.e., that of circumcision].⁷⁴

The Christian argument concerning the status of Jewish women and the fact that they did not undergo circumcision was not particularly original, and it is already attested in Patristic literature.⁷⁵ It was Lipman’s definition of Jewish identity as constructed intellectually, not physically, that is unprecedented in Ashkenazic space. Rather than repeating the traditional argument that everyone born of a Jewish mother is Jewish, he says that a Jew is anyone ‘who believes properly’, whether circumcised or not.⁷⁶

Lipman’s position here shows again the influence of Maimonides. In his com-

⁷³Visi, ‘On the Peripheries of Ashkenaz’ (as in n. 18), p. 56.

⁷⁴M1, sec. 22, fol. 116v; cf. M2, sec. 22, fol. 24v; SN, sec. 21, p. 19.

⁷⁵Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 73–81.

⁷⁶On Lipman’s argument and its dependence on Maimonides, see *ibid.*, pp. 180–90.

mentary on *Mishneh Torah*, Lipman reiterated Maimonides's emphasis on correct faith and its repercussions for Jewish identity:

Without this knowledge [of God's unity and incorporeality], no one is called a Jew, because his thought is deficient. Even if he stood up and proclaimed: 'I do not deny [a principle of faith], I believe what my forefathers believed,' it follows from this [statement in *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot yesodei ha-Torah 1:6] that he is not exempt from his obligation [to profess God's unity] [...] It is not enough to say: 'I believe what our father Abraham believed.'⁷⁷

The same emphasis appears again: as opposed to unreflectively received tradition, a set of correct theological ideas not only distinguishes good Jews from bad Jews, but also defines Jewishness *per se*. Lipman's attempts to reformulate the distinctiveness of Jewish identity, produced in response to the issue of conversion, show interesting affinities to strategies employed by contemporary Sephardic thinkers following the mass conversions of 1391.⁷⁸ Moreover, there is an interesting resonance here between Lipman's argument in *Sefer Nizahon* and Paul's declaration in his Letter to the Romans: 'A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.'⁷⁹ It may be that in his response to Christian polemic, Lipman articulated his emphasis on the intellectual nature of Judaism in a way that would sound familiar and acceptable to his Christian listeners as well as Jews. p. 138

⁷⁷Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 393 [IMHM F 16311], fol. 154r.

⁷⁸On Sephardic attitudes to conversion, heresy, and Jewish identity after 1391, see Ram Ben-Shalom, 'The Social Context of Apostasy among Fifteenth-Century Spanish Jewry: The Dynamics of a New Religious Borderland', in *Rethinking European Jewish History*, ed. by Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2009), pp. 173–98, at pp. 191–96; Yosi Yisraeli, 'Constructing and Undermining Converso Jewishness: Profiat Duran and Pablo de Santa María', in *Religious Conversion: History, Experience and Meaning*, ed. by Ira Katznelson and Miri Rubin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 185–215, at pp. 187–97; and cf. the contribution by M. Kriegel in the present volume. Lipman's awareness of these debates needs to be explored in more detail.

⁷⁹Rom 2:28–29. I have used the New International Version translation of the New Testament.

IV

As we have seen, Lipman's attempt to reconfigure the main tenets of Jewish identity along philosophical lines was embedded in the very literary structure of his *Book of Polemic*. In order to appreciate the polemical strategies Lipman employed in this text, it helps to situate them within the context of late-medieval attitudes towards authorship and the use of books. As noted by Bodeker, it is possible that Lipman knew some Latin.⁸⁰ Although there is no direct evidence that he studied or knew contemporary Christian texts, his attitudes towards authorship, as well as his preoccupation with the reception of his works and their use, show remarkable affinities with the concerns of his Christian colleagues, expressed in their Latin as well as vernacular writings.

In his study of Jean Gerson, *Authority and Publicity Before Print*, Daniel Hob-
bins argued that Gerson's literary activity reflects the transformation of late
medieval schoolmen into 'public intellectuals'.⁸¹ The medium by which they
were involved with the world beyond the school gates was the 'tract'—a short
treatise concerned with pressing current issues. We saw that Lipman, too, pre-
sented his literary activity as a response to contemporary problems in Ashke-
nazic culture. Hobbins has also identified a further trait of fifteenth-century
book culture, namely shifts in attitudes towards authorship. Lipman, like Ger-
son, reflected very explicitly on the task of writing and was concerned with the
transmission and reception of his work, as well as with the use of proper termi-
nology when discussing complex theological topics.⁸² He forbade 'the scribes
to change [his] words, since [he knew] they [would] disagree with [him] be-
cause of their lack of knowledge and because it is not what they are accustomed
to from [their] superficial reading.'⁸³ Lipman acknowledged that specific sub-
jects required specific types of language, even if it was a type which had not
been cultivated in the Ashkenazic culture before, and which both copyists and
readers might find challenging. p. 139

More importantly, Lipman consciously strove to control the reception of his text and enhance its usability. He divided *Sefer Nizahon* into 354 sections and seven groups, one for each day of the week, 'to hint that every day all Israel

⁸⁰See Kaufmann, *Lipman Mühlhausen* (as in n. 5), pp. 54–56.

⁸¹Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 128–51.

⁸²On Gerson's concern with theological terminology, see *ibid.*, pp. 41–45.

⁸³*SN*, Introduction. Cf. M1, fol. 103r; M2, fol. 10r.

are obligated to be precise in their faith and remove the stumbling block from those who distance themselves from the faith.⁸⁴ Similarly, he warned his readers that ‘no one fulfils the requirement [to study the principles of faith] by superficial reading, only by slowly accustoming himself to contemplate all these [matters].’⁸⁵ This type of book structure was not unprecedented in the Jewish context. At the end of the thirteenth century, Isaac of Corbeil (d. 1280) divided the commandments still in practice into seven groups or ‘pillars’ in his compendium *‘Amudei ha-Golah*, widely known as *Sefer Miṣwot Katan*. This halakhic handbook became one of the most popular and most frequently copied medieval Hebrew texts.⁸⁶ In his preface, Isaac of Corbeil explicitly commanded everyone to own a copy of his book and study it on a daily basis.⁸⁷ While not going so far as to suggest that the study of his work is a religious obligation, Lipman used the weekly and yearly grouping of the sections of his work to make his book more accessible to a broader audience and to emphasize the importance of regular study of the principles of faith and rational understanding of the commandments. p. 140

Since each day’s argument was directed against a different group of ideological opponents, the division also fulfils the function of a thematic index. The thematic subdivisions and careful numbering of each paragraph make the book easier to use and help the reader find specific arguments fairly quickly. Lipman proudly declared that this was exactly his intention.⁸⁸ His concern with the usability of books is also reflected in another, halakhic index he created. Preserved in a manuscript now in Moscow, this is a systematic index to the *Book of Mordechai* based on *Hilkhot Rabbi Isaac Alfasi* and the *responsa* of Me’ir ben Barukh of Rothenburg.⁸⁹

Such attempts to control the reception of texts are characteristic of late medieval schoolmen. According to Hobbins, scholars tried to enhance the reading experience and orient the reader by means of specially designed page-layouts,

⁸⁴ SN, Introduction; M1, fol. 106v; cf. M2, fol. 14v.

⁸⁵ M1, fol. 106r; cf. M2, fol. 13v. Hackspan’s edition is corrupted at this point.

⁸⁶ On Isaac of Corbeil and his work, see Urbach, *The Tosafists* (as in n. 29), pp. 571–75.

⁸⁷ *Sefer Semak mi-Zurich*, ed. by Yiṣḥak Ya’akov Har-Shoshanim–Rosenberg, 2nd revised edn, 3 vols (Jerusalem, 1981–88), I (1981), pp. 17–18.

⁸⁸ ולמען יקל על הדורש למצוא בו חפצו. SN, Introduction.

⁸⁹ סימני אילו מסודרי לפי ספר לב [צ”ל: לר] אלפס ותשוב מהר”ם שבתוכו אשר סידר רבינו ליפמן מפראגא. Moscow, Russian State Library, MS Guenzburg 995 [IMHM F 43969], fols 124r–177v.

diagrams, headings, and rubrics.⁹⁰ We need not go too far for a parallel example in Lipman's surroundings. Lipman's contemporary and fellow Prague inhabitant Jan Hus also prepared alphabetical and thematic indexes for the benefit of the readers of his Latin and vernacular treatises. In his Czech *Expositions*, he likened the reader to someone searching for treasure hidden in a storage room, or trying to catch fish without any fishing equipment. To avoid such unnecessary toil, he wrote, 'I prepared a net [...] which will inform you and show you where things stand in [these] books.'⁹¹ Hus went into detail in explaining how his alphabetical index should be used to find an exposition of the subject the reader needs. Like Lipman, Hus addressed the scribes employed in copying his work and bade them not to change anything in the indexes, 'for if they [that is, the copyists] rip these nets, then the fishermen will not be able to catch what they want.'⁹² p. 141

Lipman's writings also contain numerous references to his other works, which he introduced whenever an opportunity presented itself. In fact, Lipman referred to his own texts more often than to anyone else's. Very much like scholars today, by bringing his readers' attention to a more detailed discussion of a particular subject elsewhere in his writings, Lipman used these cross-references to promote his own literary work.⁹³ Moreover, these references show that, like late medieval Christian scholars, Lipman saw his oeuvre as an interconnected corpus. Each book serves its specific purpose, yet as a whole they present a coherent worldview. They therefore also become a comprehensive set of study materials, and inasmuch as they interact with one another, they create additional levels of meaning.

⁹⁰Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity* (as in n. 81), pp. 206–08.

⁹¹'A že mieti mnoho peněz a nevěděti, kde ležie v komoře, bývá teskno hledati, když přijde potřeba, a mieti rybník veliký, z něhož nemůž člověk ryb prodati jinému, než aby sám lovil, a pak nemieti ani sieti, ani saku, ani nevodu, bylo by dost těžké ryb k jiedlu dobývati, protož aby v těchto knihách, kdož je bude mieti, věděl, kde jako v komoře leží poklad duše a jako v haltěříku ryba, aby ji ku póžitku sobě i jinému popadl, připravil sem sieti, to věz zpravidlo neb ukazadlo, jenž tě zpraví a ukáže tobě, kde co stojí v knihách.' Jan Hus, *Výklady*, ed. by Amedeo Molnár, *Magistri Iohannis Hus Opera Omnia*, vol. 1 (Praha: Academia, 1975), p. 29, lines 147–55.

⁹²'Protož prosím vás, písari, kteří budete psáti, aby sieti těchto v dole psaných nezedrali. Nebť by lovci nepopadli, co by chtěli, jakž by sieti ztrhali.' *Ibid.*, lines 169–71.

⁹³For instance, at the beginning of his *Commentary on the Thirteen Principles*, Lipman referred to more detailed discussions of this topic in his *Sefer Nizahon*, *Sefer ha-Berit* and *Sefer ha-Eshkol*. Cf. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 529 [IMHM F 17204], fol. 16r. See also Kaufmann, *Lipman Mühlhausen* (as in n. 5), p. 119.

We do not know whether Lipman, like Gerson and his brother Jean the Celestine, collected and organized his works, trying to preserve them for posterity as a set.⁹⁴ Manuscript evidence suggests that at least some copyists were attentive to the benefits of reading and studying Lipman's texts together.⁹⁵ While his *magnum opus* *Sefer Nizahon* tended to be transmitted separately, his minor works, especially those discussing the Hebrew alphabet and scribal practice, are often preserved together. Even if his readers did not always treat his works as a coherent corpus, the literary and rhetorical tools used by Lipman show convincingly that, in order to appreciate fully his contribution to the development of Jewish identity in late medieval Ashkenaz, it is necessary to see him as a participant in a broader culture—one that included Christian as well as Jewish scholars.

p. 142

In his groundbreaking work, alluded to in the title of this study, Benedict Anderson examines how intellectuals have shaped the modern concept of the nation by using various cultural media.⁹⁶ Here, I have attempted to present Lipman in similar fashion—as an intellectual who aimed to respond to the cultural challenges of his time by imagining communities of ‘others’ and re-imagining his own community through the medium of literary polemic. By shifting his readers’ focus from the physical to the intellectual boundaries of Judaism, Lipman embraced a concept of Jewish identity that made it necessary to imagine and articulate the conditions of belonging. His radical programme of a rationalistic re-definition of Ashkenazic culture was deeply rooted in the contemporary intellectual landscape, Jewish as well as non-Jewish. Whether

⁹⁴Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity* (as in n. 81), pp. 206–08.

⁹⁵According to the catalogue of the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts of the National Library of Israel, the following manuscripts contain more than one work by Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 529 [IMHM F 17204] (*Kawanat ha-Tefilah*, *Alfa Beta*, *Commentary on the Thirteen Principles*); Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 393 [IMHM F 16311] (*Commentary on Mishneh Torah*, *Kawanat ha-Tefilah*, *Sefer ha-Berit* and several poems); Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, MS Kaufmann A259 [IMHM F 14557] (*Commentary on Job*, *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, *Sermon on Ps 19:8*); New York, Columbia University, X 893 Ab 81 [IMHM F 16460] (*Alfa Beta*, *Tikun Sefer Torah*); New York, JTS, Rab. 540 [IMHM F 39230] (copy of the preceding); Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, MS Cod. hebr. 291 [IMHM F 1088] (*Alfa Beta*, *Ta'amei Tefilin*); Ramat Gan, Bar Ilan University, MS 844/3 [IMHM F 47351] (*Alfa Beta*, *Tikun Sefer Torah*). One manuscript of *Sefer Nizahon* (M2, see above n. 16) also contains a short bedtime prayer attributed to Lipman (fol. 2r).

⁹⁶Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

he ultimately succeeded in shaping later Ashkenazic approaches to rationalism and philosophical study is a question that would require another study.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, Lipman's *Sefer Nizahon* exemplifies the capacity of polemical genres to express intellectual concerns beyond those generated by conflict-driven interaction between Jews and Christians, and testifies to the remarkable potential of late-medieval Ashkenazic intellectual life around the year 1400.

⁹⁷The degree of continuity in the modes of philosophical study in Ashkenaz between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is a matter of dispute; see Visi, 'On the Peripheries of Ashkenaz' (as in n. 18), pp. 230–32. There was a tendency in later Ashkenazic approaches to texts such as the *Guide of the Perplexed* to downplay their rationalistic dimension; see Elchanan Reiner, 'The Attitude of Ashkenazi Society to the New Science in the Sixteenth Century', *Science in Context*, 10 (1997), 589–603, at pp. 594–95. However, the appropriation and dissemination of basic philosophical ideas on a more popular level, not necessarily mediated through specialized study, as well as their influence on the understanding of Jewish identity, still await a thorough examination.