A Discovery: The Venice Minhogimbukh

SCOTT-MARTIN KOSOFSKY

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, WHILE LOOKING FOR ILLUSTRATIONS to use in my first Judaica project, *The Harvard Hillel Sabbath Songbook,* I came across reproductions of several Renaissance woodcuts in an old Jewish encyclopedia. Their source was given as *"Sefer minhagim,* Amsterdam, 1645." At the time I had reclaimed only enough of my Hebrew school education to know that *sefer* means "book"; the other word was familiar, but I couldn't quite remember its meaning. To learn more, I would have to see the book. The Harvard libraries had several books with that name or similar names, and still more on microfilm, including one that matched the particulars given in the encyclopedia. When I saw how *minhagim* was spelled in Hebrew, I looked it up and found that it means "customs." What I had stumbled upon was the *Book of Customs.*

I was charmed at first sight. I had in my hands something I had never seen before: a compact guide to the Jewish year, complete with over forty delightful illustrations of the main holidays and rituals. I knew this because, despite the Hebrew title by which it was cataloged, the book was in Yiddish with prayers in Hebrew. So rather than a lofty *Sefer minhagim* or *Sefer haminhagim,* it was in reality a humble Yiddish customs book, the *Minhogimbukh.* I grew up in a household in which Yiddish was a principal language, and that I still had some ability in the language gave me an entrée. That it was a fine example of book design brought it into my professional realm. I noticed interesting differences in the six editions I saw at Harvard, which inspired me to ask about the books at other institutions and before long I saw some thirty more at the libraries of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Hebrew Union College, and Brandeis University and still others from the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Their dates were spread across the range of the book's history, 1566 to 1874.

I was surprised to discover that while a few of the illustrations were known, having been reproduced here and there, the book itself had no reputation. It was just one of the myriads of old Jewish books. I learned from a few Judaica librarians that it was especially well neglected because scholars

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of Judaism have paid little attention to books in Yiddish, written as they were for the unwashed and unlettered; Yiddish scholars, as a rule, are interested in literature, not in religion. That the early editions are in *Old* Yiddish, before the Slavic influences had become so much a part of the language, placed it even further from mainstream interests. Curiously, this book, which had been so useful for so long, had no successor. I was quite pleased to hear this; the book's outsider status made it available to become *my* book, my point of departure for a journey into the realm of Jewish learning.

From the many editions of the *Minhogimbukh* I had photocopied, ten of the woodcuts made their way into *The Harvard Hillel Sabbath Songbook*. The others were pasted into a scrapbook, arranged by theme: Sabbath cuts on one page, Passover cuts on another, whole sets bundled at the back. The thought of preparing a new edition occurred to me early on, but it was years before I felt capable of doing so. Fortunately, the *Songbook* was a success (it's still in print after all these years), and many more Judaica projects came my way, each an opportunity to become more engaged with Judaism. This wasn't to be a Homeric journey home through rough seas and great perils. Instead, it was an near-accidental discovery that became an ever-increasing influence on my work and life. Perhaps it was *bashert*–"meant to be," as one says in Yiddish. My grandmothers would have thought so.

A History of the *Minhogimbukh*

For over four hundred years, the *Minhogimbukh* was among the most popular Jewish books in the European Diaspora, just after the Bible, the siddur (prayer book), and the Passover haggadah. It was published as the people's guide to the Jewish year in dozens of editions from Amsterdam to Venice to Warsaw and Kiev. In addition to its rich presentation of the rituals and prayers, the book's illustrated editions featured the zodiac and the seasons of farm life, giving it an additional role as a kind of Jewish *Old Farmers' Almanac*. Its roots were in the Hebrew *Sefer minhagim* written in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century by the Hungarian rabbi Eyzik (Isaac) Tyrnau, one of a number of such works from the late Middle Ages. The Tyrnau text circulated in manuscript for about one hundred fifty years before its first printed edition, still in Hebrew, was published in 1566 in Venice.

Eyzik Tyrnau's time was one of tragedy and loss. His book was written in the aftermath of the Black Death (1348–1350) in the belief that there was a kind of symbolic equivalence between a people and its customs. By preserving its customs, even if only in writing, the community would survive the pestilence,

expulsions, harsh laws, and persecution that characterized Jewish life of the period. Tyrnau's work was thorough and well organized, setting the pattern for the later books of customs. The simplicity of his language suggests that he wrote for laypeople rather than for other rabbis. His book's basic outline was this: the Jewish week from the end of Sabbath through evening prayers on Thursday; preparations for Sabbath and the Sabbath day itself; the twelve months including all the holidays; and last, the life cycle events of marriage, birth, and death.

In 1590, again in Venice, which was one of the centers of Jewish life in Italy, the *Sefer minhagim* was published for the first time in Yiddish, which would be the language of most of its editions for the next 300 years. Leaning heavily on Tyrnau's model, the author-editor-translator of this edition was Simon Levi ben Yehuda Gunzburg, who had come to Italy from Swabia; the printer was Giovanni ("Zuan" in Venetian dialect) di Gara, a Christian who specialized in Jewish works. The book was a tremendous success, as stated in the preface to the second edition of 1593:

> This useful little chapbook containing the traditional customs was first brought to the printing house by the honorable Rabbi Shimon Ashkenazi [Simon Levi Gunzburg] three years ago. The book has been praised and admired by all for its great usefulness and as a comprehensible guide to the customs and traditions of all Israel and Judah, especially to those of Ashkenaz [German Jewry and its sphere], which are explained by the author in great detail and with precision, following the sages and the rabbis. . . .
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> Gunzburg soon saw the need for a second edition since all the copies of the first left his hands in great haste because everyone knew they were worth their weight in gold. But he did not see that as the reason to leave well enough alone; he now extended his view to include all the customs from other places he researched and collected, sparing no time and effort. . . . Also, there is more splendor and glory added [a reference to the forty woodcut illustrations and improved typography], in quality as well as quantity. Everyone will notice, nobles and small children alike, that this volume is thicker than the previous one.

It is this second edition, published in "the big city of Venice" in 1593, that I believe is the standard upon which almost all of the subsequent editions were based. I have used it as both the framework and as a regularly recurring point of reference for this book. Seeing that Gunzburg treated the book so flexibly, I realized that the *Minhogimbukh* was more of a *form* than it was a specific *text,* and a very adaptable form at that.

No records have been uncovered about the circulation of the customs books, but contemporary reports on other Jewish books of the time suggest that

a success like the one described in the 1593 preface would translate to sales of between 1,500 and 3,000 copies. Clearly the sales were broad, since there were only about 1,500 Jews living in Venice at the time. Including customs from throughout Ashkenaz was clearly part of the publisher's marketing strategy.

Jewish Books of the Period

The *Minhogimbukh* was one of about thirty-five Yiddish books published in Europe, many in northern Italy, between 1545 and 1609. The audience was mainly women and "men who are like women," meaning men who were not literate in Hebrew. Among the more popular Yiddish titles were racy verse romances and fables based on popular European literature, a book of religious commandments for women, and an enduring volume of Torah paraphrases called *Tsenerene* ("Go Forth and Behold"), so long-lived that my maternal grandmother, who came to America from Bessarabia as a young woman in 1914, used to refer to it disparagingly as a synonym for "old hat." My uncle Yankel would ask her, "So, Gittel, how was the sermon?" "Same old *Tsenerene*" was her slightly bored reply.

By the time the first Yiddish *Minhogimbukh* appeared in 1590, an extraordinary body of learned works was already in print in Hebrew, including major rabbinical works about Jewish law that remain among the cornerstones of Jewish legal discourse. Between the 1520s and the 1550s, the Iberian-born Joseph Caro produced a prodigious codification of Jewish law (halakhah) and its sources called *Bet Yosef,* "The House of Joseph," best known through its digest form, the *Shulchan arukh* ("A Set Table"). Written by a Sephardic Jew, it made little account of Ashkenazic customs. To address the deficit, Rabbi Moses Isserles of Cracow published in 1564/65 an extensive series of glosses on Caro's work that he entitled *Mapah* (literally, "tablecloth"). Isserles drew heavily upon various Ashkenazic customs books and Eyzik-Tyrnau was one of his frequently quoted informants. The sheer physical enormity of these Hebrew works, intended as they were for only the most learned of rabbis and scholars, makes obvious the need for a digestible pocket guide like the people's *Minhogimbukh.*

An Excellent and Useful Design

The grace of the design of the *Minhogimbukh* enabled its readers to navigate easily through the Jewish year. Its refined, well-crafted typography–retained in most of the later editions–enabled one to differentiate Hebrew from Yiddish and liturgy from commentary, and to easily find the major passages and commandments.

It was in the best tradition of the Renaissance book–and of the great Jewish books of the Renaissance–in which beauty was achieved through clarity and balance, regardless of the complexity of the material and the number of layers of information presented. The typefaces of the early editions were especially interesting to me and learning about them led me in some unexpected directions. The text typeface, which I first believed was of the kind known as Rashi, or rabbinic, turned out to be another old semicursive form called *vaybertaytsh,* literally, "ladies' German." The older scholarly literature that I first consulted suggested that the use of this typeface meant that the book was intended for women. As intriguing as that theory appeared, the book's contents indicated that it was not true, at least not completely. Since the book is replete with certain rituals and liturgy that in its period would have been performed only by men, it was clear that it was not published primarily as a women's book.

The Later Editions

The third Venetian edition in Yiddish, published in 1601, gives the impression that there was a need to restimulate interest in the book. Its sophisticated woodcuts show a family that appears to have moved from the modest surroundings of the Ghetto to sumptuous digs on the Grand Canal. The men are in stately Venetian dress while the women wear low-cut gowns–even while baking matzoh! Yiddish editions closer in style to the 1593 Venice edition were published in Basel in 1610 and 1611, and a Prague edition also appeared in 1611, one of the few to mention the name of Eyzik Tyrnau. The first in a long list of Amsterdam editions appeared in 1645. Also published in Amsterdam were four illustrated editions in Hebrew (1685 to 1774), and one in Ladino, the Spanish-based vernacular tongue of the Sephardic Jews, in 1768, also illustrated. New Yiddish editions appeared regularly in Germany from the 1690s well into the nineteenth century. From the late eighteenth century through the time of the last editions, in the late 1800s, the places of publication moved steadily eastward, from small towns in Germany to Poland and the Ukraine. Warsaw editions were published in 1871 and 1884 and a Kiev edition in 1874. An edition published in Piotrkow Trybunalski, Poland, in 1891, is the last that I've found that follows the printed format established in Venice 300 years earlier and the manuscript text of Eyzik Tyrnau.

Interestingly, the first and only surviving Yiddish manuscript is an illustrated customs book from northern Italy that was made by or before 1503 (a back page records a death in that year). The manuscript is at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The calligraphy and the illustrations appear to be the work of the same hand. One imagines that it was made for teaching

purposes or perhaps as a mock-up for a more elaborate illumination, though none resembling it exists.

The variations in the editions are found mainly in minor customs and additional liturgies, especially in the choice of liturgical hymns *(piyutim),* which often follow local tradition and the taste of the clergy. The seasonal references made in the captions to the zodiac woodcuts are missing entirely from the later, unillustrated editions.

The Illustrations

Woodcut illustrations appeared in many, but not all, of the editions from 1593 (Venice) to 1774 (Amsterdam), and they show remarkable continuity of style. With the exception of the 1601 Venice edition, they differ only in small details. The full complement of illustrations numbers forty, five of which are repeated: twenty-eight squarish woodcuts of holiday and weekly customs; and twelve smaller, horizontal ones showing the month's zodiac and farming activity. By the time of Gunzburg's first illustrated edition, this style of woodcut was well established in illustrated Passover haggadot, such as the famous ones printed in Prague in 1526 and Mantua in 1560. (In 1609 a famous illustrated haggadah was printed in Venice by Giovanni di Gara, the printer of the Venice editions of the *Minhogimbukh.)* The pictures migrate not only among haggadot and customs books, but also between Christian and Jewish books. A bearded man riding an ass may appear as Elijah in a haggadah and Jesus in a book of Gospels. A number of the illustrations of biblical scenes in the *Sefer Yosifon* and *Tsenerene* are adapted from the famous ones by Hans Holbein. The *Sefer Yosifon* is a Yiddish adaptation of a Hebrew translation of *The War of the Jews* by the Roman-era Jewish historian Flavius Josephus–a book of disasters. The woodcut genre survived in haggadot into the late nineteenth century, long after its last appearance in the customs books.

Among scholars of Old Yiddish, there has been some discussion as to whether the *Minhogimbukh* woodcuts were made by Jews or Gentiles, but little can be proven conclusively. There is a possibility that the woodcuts in the 1593 Venice edition were made by Jakob Bak of Prague, who spent the 1590s working in Venice at the publishing house of Giovanni diGara and whose sons published editions of the *Minhogimbukh* in Prague between 1620 and 1660. The woodcuts in the 1611 and later Prague editions are virtually identical to those that appeared in the first illustrated edition in 1593.

That these charming, simple pictures were retained for so long may be without parallel in the history of publishing. For the Jews of central and west-

ern Europe, they formed a ubiquitous iconography and it's hard to imagine why they fell from favor or why they didn't survive in updated versions or, in the least, as educational art for children. Similar scenes of Sabbath candle-lighting ceremonies and Passover customs can be found in manuscripts and printed in pamphlets and broadsides, but the images as a group–as a visual vocabulary–vanished. It may well have been because of the increased strictness that characterized orthodoxy and Hasidism from the eighteenth century onward and, with it, a rigid interpretation of the biblical injunction against graven images.

Why Did the Minhogimbukh *Fall from Favor?*

The slow demise of the illustrations leads one to wonder why the *Minhogimbukh* itself lost its popularity. One can only speculate. After the Emancipation that began with Napoleon, Jews became increasingly splintered in the nineteenth century. There were two new directions in Jewish life of western and central Europe: the Reform movement with its radical reconsideration of traditional customs and a modernized learned culture called *Die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the Science of Judaism) with its emphasis on historical and archaeological studies. European national languages gradually replaced Yiddish as the vernacular in many Jewish households, especially those of higher economic status. Books of personal prayers, a kind called *Tekhines,* often associated with women and long published in Yiddish, were now being written and published in German and other mainstream languages. One can imagine that some of the old woodcuts made nineteenth-century "enlightened" Jews more than a bit squeamish.

The Middle Ages had been recast in a Romantic context–everyone read Sir Walter Scott. The primitive was far from fashion and no one recoils from the primitive past more than the newly–and tentatively–assimilated. Where the book held its audience, albeit in unillustrated editions, was in eastern Europe, where lives were still conducted in Yiddish and opportunities for education fewer.

A Strategy for Revival

The spare, telegraphic prose of the *Minhogimbukh* was well suited to the readers of its times. Though the book was intended for those with a limited knowledge of Hebrew, it nonetheless assumed a familiarity with the Bible, the basic commandments, the principal prayers, and the cycle of synagogue services. Memorizing such material was a fundamental part of the education of Jewish

boys and, to a lesser extent, girls, at every level. Thus the *Minhogimbukh* offered more than just basic rote facts; it also dished up bits of talmudic lore and references to the legal works of the great rabbis of the Middle Ages. Some key blessings were printed in their entirety, just in case the memorization didn't stick. On the whole, it did a superb job of helping its readers feel comfortable and competent in the Jewish world.

Comfortable and competent–that's what I was looking for: to know the home rituals and to be able to walk into a synagogue and understand what's going on. It wasn't quite enough for me to just "do Judaism," to know that on this day we recite this prayer or those Torah verses. I wanted to know what the words meant in the context in which they were written. If these explanations were added to the structural frame of the *Minhogimbukh,* I thought, then it might become an excellent vehicle for the chattering twenty-first century. I imagined that the readers for a newly reconstituted book of customs would be those who, like me, wanted to know the customs for a given day and to have a clear yet concise idea of the words that are spoken and heard on that day: the blessings, prayers, and Bible readings. There is a need, especially among those who do not know Hebrew and Aramaic, for something that is between a book of Jewish holiday lore, on the one hand, and a prayer book and Bible, on the other–a concise, vernacular guide to how a Jewish life is lived from day to day and throughout the year. For three hundred years this was the role of the *Minhogimbukh.*

Using the 1593 Venice *Minhogimbukh* as a skeleton, I added to this edition a number of discursive elements: introductions to the book's major divisions and concepts, descriptions of all of the prayers and many of the Bible readings, a chart of the Amidah benedictions and the various names for its components, a general chapter on Jewish law and custom, and one on Jewish prayer to explain how the daily prayer rituals are performed–something the author of the *Minhogimbukh* took for granted. Also added are chapters on customs and holidays that weren't mentioned or didn't exist in 1593, such as bar and bat mitzvah and Holocaust Remembrance Day. The annotations in the margins point to some variant customs of different Jewish groups, references to the Bible and other key texts, historical notes and sources, and suggestions for further exploration.

The 1593 edition included a 70-year calendar and a detailed accounting of the minutiae of the calendrical cycle in each monthly chapter, giving the reader a set of conditional propositions such as, "If the beginning of the month falls on a Thursday, then the Torah reading is *X;* if it falls on the Sabbath, then

the Torah reading is *Y,"* and so on. Because we live at a time when Jewish calendar information is available on many Web sites or at any synagogue, I have dispensed with it entirely. Instead, to give the reader a sense of the substance of the synagogue experience, I give synopses of all the Bible readings according to a hypothetical model year but always with a notice to the reader that the schedule of these readings varies somewhat from year to year.

Within the traditional sphere, Jewish practice has not changed greatly since 1593, but it has changed. To have followed the old book exclusively would have resulted in some strange affectations. For example, the well-known prayer *Modeh ani,* which Jews recite upon awakening, is not in the 1593 *Minhogimbukh;* though it was published for the first time in 1569, it was not widely recited until some time in the seventeenth century. To publish a modern book without it would be very odd, indeed. So to reconcile the old practices with those of today, I used as a general–though not exclusive–guide Ashkenazic Orthodox prayer books such as ArtScroll's siddur (the prayer book for weekdays) and machzor (the prayer book for Sabbath and festivals). These are the most commonly used prayer books in traditional circles.

Of What Denomination Is This Book?

The customs in this book are based in the Ashkenazic orthodox tradition, with many noted exceptions. I chose this path for two reasons: because it is similar to the 1593 model and because it is the basis for all other forms of Jewish worship. What we call traditional or orthodox Judaism today was, generally speaking, the only kind of Judaism practiced in the sixteenth century, though there were, of course, differences among rites–Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Eastern, and so on–which were the byproducts of the geography of the Diaspora. Though these rites continue to exist, the big differences among today's Jews are more philosophical and political–what Americans call denominational.

I offer this revival of the old *Minhogimbukh* as an attempt to describe a traditional baseline of Jewish custom without denominational particularity, though with a consciousness of the many varieties of Jewish religious experience of both the past and the present. If it is "cafeteria religion," then it's one that serves the traditional main courses. Some might find my approach singularly *un*orthodox and wonder why I, as a liberal, didn't opt instead for a more modernized basis, such as Conservative or Reform or Reconstructionist Judaism. In fact, there are parts of the book in which the views of those groups have been quite influential. Nowhere is that more evident than in matters of gender. Inspired by the congregations of every stripe in which

women and men play equal roles in the liturgy, I have purged most gender differences with regard to commandments and customs, though the old way is mentioned, too. I was amazed at how easily this could be accomplished, without compromise to language or sense. I should say, though, that I have kept the masculine pronouns for God; to do otherwise is to jettison nearly three thousand years of mental images, continuity of sound, and literary sensibility.

I did not go back to the traditional customs and liturgies expecting to find lost meaning, but there it was. Even more surprisingly, I found deep meaning in texts that had been dropped or modified by the liberal denominations: the prayers of supplication and confession, the tragic liturgies of *Tishah b'Av,* and even the *Avodah,* the daily call for the restoration of the Temple and a return to the sacrifices of old. What can a post-Freudian person like me find in such things? I found these: a broad and intimate confrontation with myself and with God, a sense of community for better or for worse, an appreciation of God's greatness, miracles, and ambiguities–all together, a clearer view of the moral and the immoral. We do not have to agree or find goodness in all of these liturgies, but if we choose to revise some of them, we must do so consciously, and, as in psychotherapy, which for many has taken the place of such confrontations, the regularity of the sessions is part of the treatment.

In the years after the Holocaust, fire-and-brimstone liturgies were pretty hard to take, and the more liberal denominations emphasized messages of consolation. Rightly so. What was set aside, though, was the human balance, the depth of confrontation with God and one's self–the sense, if I dare say it, of sin and of our bad tendencies. If we lack a relationship with these difficult parts, the inspiring and redemptive moments are deprived of their power. We don't need a *Tishah b'Av* with a triumphal, happy ending; the real one will do just fine, thanks. The traditional Jewish liturgies and customs are worth one's time and attention because they help us to ask ourselves–on a regular basis–who we were, who we are now, and who we aspire to be.

CUSTOMS

MUCH NICER THAN THE PREVIOUS VERSIONS

Everyone will enjoy reading it!

CONTAINS ALL THE CUSTOMS in Ashkenaz for the entire year and includes customs for Italy, Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, and several more.

LAWS EXPLAINED WELL, so you will know how to live like a good person.

And it was not forgotten to include a CALENDAR for seventy years, counted precisely, containing the zodiac and the times for the New Moon, which were not included previously.

FOREVER AND EVER, HE

"THIS IS GOD, OUR GOD WILL BE OUR GUIDE"

– PSALMS 48:14 –

Printed for the second time in the Big City of

VENICE

in the year 5353 /1593

at the house of Zuan di Gara

Caption: This is a word-for-word translation of the title page of the first illustrated Yiddish edition of the Book of Customs, Venice, 1593. *It's a classic of mass marketing, utterly familiar in its style–and with all the usual hype: "new and improved version," "will work everywhere," "helps you live like a good person," and "made by smart people in the Big City." Who could ask for anything more?*

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ANNOTATIONS

The Book of Customs was printed by HarperSanFrancisco in 2004, and this portion of it, from the "Introduction," is reprinted with their permission.

1. Bibliographies of customs books. Though there are no thorough bibliographies of the customs book literature, some preliminary lists have been made. The oldest is Moritz Steinschneider's catalog of Jewish books at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, published 1852–1860. More up-to-date information has appeared mainly in the work of three leading scholars of Old Yiddish literature, the late Chone Shmeruk of Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Jean Baumgarten of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, and Chava Turniansky, also of Hebrew University.

2. Ezik Tyrnau. Born in Vienna, Tyrnau had been a disciple of Rabbi Abraham Klausner, who had written his own *Sefer haminhagim,* later published (in Hebrew) in Riva di Trento in 1558. Klausner had also been the master of the Worms authority on law and custom, Jacob Moellin, known as the Maharil, whose *Sefer hamaharil* was published in Sabbioneta in 1556. Their work was in the tradition of customs collections from France and Germany that date back to the eleventh century, some of which predate the *Machzor Vitry,* one of the main sources for daily and holiday liturgies and life cycle customs. I am grateful to Jean Baumgarten for sharing with me his unpublished paper, "Prayer, ritual and practice in Ashkenazic Jewish society: The tradition of Yiddish customs books, 15th c.–18th c."

A legend about Eyzik Tyrnau and his beautiful daughter, who was pursued by a Christian prince, was the subject of a story published in Yiddish in Frankfurt-am-Main, ca. 1715. It was later translated into Hebrew as *Etzba Elohim,* "The Finger of God," and published in Königsberg in 1857.

3. Editions. The following is a far-from-complete list of editions up to the year 1800 compiled from the aforementioned works and my own research. **Yiddish editions** *(illustrated through 1768, unless noted otherwise):* Venice 1590 (listed mistakenly by Steinschneider as Mantua, this first Yiddish edition has no illustrations); Venice 1593, *first illustrated edition;* Venice 1601; Basel 1610; Basel 1611; Prague 1611; Prague 1620; Amsterdam 1645; Amsterdam 1662; Prague 1665; Frankfurt a.M. 1690; Frankfurt a.M. 1690; Dyhernfurt; 1692; Amsterdam 1707; Frankfurt a.O. 1707; Frankfurt a.M. 1707; Frankfurt a.M. 1708; Frankfurt a.M. 1714; Frankfurt a.M. 1715; Frankfurt a.M. 1717; Amsterdam 1723; Frankfurt a.M. 1723; Amsterdam 1727; Hamburg 1729; Hamburg 1729; Frankfurt a.M. 1729; Frankfurt a.M. 1733; Furth 1752; Furth 1756; Frankfurt a.M. 1762; Amsterdam 1768; Amsterdam 1768, *Ladino;* Offenbach 1779; Furth 1779; Sulzbach 1787; Sulzbach 1800. **Hebrew editions** *(not illustrated unless noted otherwise):* Venice 1566; Lublin 1570; Cracow 1578; Venice 1591; Cracow 1593; Cracow 1597; Cracow 1598; Venice 1598; Basel 1598; Frankfurt a.M. ca. 1674, *illustrated;* Prague 1682, *illustrated;* Amsterdam 1685, *illustrated;* Amsterdam 1708, *illustrated;* Frankfurt a.M. 1708, *illustrated;* Amsterdam 1768, *illustrated;* Amsterdam 1774, *last illustrated edition?;* Nowy Dwor 1784. I thank Prof. Jerold Frakes for first pointing me in the direction of some of these sources.

4. Italian yiddish printing and the *Minhogimbukh.* See Chone Shmeruk, "Defusei yidish beitalia," in *Italia* 3 (1982); Jean Baumgarten: "Giovani di Gara, printer of Yiddish books in Venice (16th c.)," *Revue des Etudes Juives* (2001); M. Epstein: "Simon Levi Ginzburg's illustrated customal of Venice, 1593 and its travels," *Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 4 (1973); Chone Shmeruk: "Haiyurim min haminhagim beyidish Venitzia 1593," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 15 (1984); Chone Shmeruk: *Haiyurim lesifrei yidish bameot ha16–17* (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1986); Chone Shmeruk: "Reshimah kronologit shel hamahadurot beyidish shel haminhagim shel Shimon Halevi Ginzburg ad 1800: Haiyurim min haminhagim beyidish (Venitzia 1593)," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 15 (1984).

For a concise panorama of Jewish life in Italy during the period of the *Minhogimbukh,* see Elliott Horowitz, "Families and Their Fortunes: The Jews of Early Modern Italy" in *Cultures of the Jews,* ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken, 2003). Also *The Jews of Early Modern Venice,* ed. Robert C. Davis and Benjamin Ravid (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); and Robert Bonfil's *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). The most voluminous works on the subject are Shlomo Simonsohn's dozen documentary histories of Jewish life in Italy and its relations with the Holy See. These include his *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1977), and his four-volume *A Documentary History of the Jews in Italy* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1982–1986). In the aforementioned works as well as in his *The Apostolic See and the Jews* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1991), Simonsohn

describes an occurrence in 1595, in which all Jewish libraries were searched, under orders from Rome, for anti-Christian material. The legacy is four hundred thirty inventories, which give us an extraordinary record of what books Jews read–or, at least, bought.

For early Yiddish literature in general, see Jean Baumgarten, *Introduction à la littérature yiddish ancienne* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1993); Joachim Neugroschel, *No Star Too Beautiful: Yiddish Stories from 1382 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002; and Jerold Frakes's forthcoming *An Anthology of Old and Middle Yiddish, 1100–1700* (Oxford University Press).

About *Tsenerene.* This most enduring of Yiddish religious works was written in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries by the itinerant Polish rabbi Yaakov ben Yitzchak Ashkenazi and first published about 1608. The title is a quotation from the Song of Songs, *Tzeenah ureenah,* "Come out and see [you daughters of Zion]." The book's biblical paraphrases are excerpts of classic midrash translated into Yiddish. It would be hard to underestimate the importance and ubiquity of this work in the lives of European Jewish women. (See also note to p. xxiv.)

5. Typography. Herbert C. Zafren, "Variety in the Typography of Yiddish, 1535–1635," in *Hebrew Union College Annual* 53 (1982); and by the same writer, "Early Yiddish Typography," in *Jewish Book Annual* 44 (1986).

There are passages in the *Minhogimbukh* that address women directly, explaining their obligation to observe certain commandments and lack of obligation toward others. Recognizing the desire of some women to involve themselves with mitzvot that were the domain of men, Gunzburg writes in the *Minhogimbukh,* "I shall provide women with some consolation: if they nevertheless do keep the commandments that they are not obligated to, they shall receive reward for that, albeit a small reward. According to the Talmud, a person obligated to observe a commandment receives a great reward for doing so, and the person not obligated to do so receives a smaller one. If you wonder what the reason behind this is and say that it should be the other way around, I shall give you several explanations–if you do not like one, you should choose the other. . . ."

6. Bibliothèque nationale ms hebr. 586. I am grateful to Prof. Jerold Frakes for first bringing this document to my attention and especially to Prof. Diane Wolfthal for sharing with me her research on it that is now collected in her book, *Picturing Yiddish: Gender, Identity, and Memory in the Illustrated Yiddish Books of Renaissance Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

7. Woodcuts. Who made the *Minhogimbukh* woodcuts has been a matter of some speculation and has been written about by Shmeruk and by Naomi Feuchtwanger-Sarig in her article "How Italian are the Venice Minhagim of 1593? A Chapter in the History of Yiddish Printing in Italy" published in *Schöpferische Momente des europäischen Judentums* 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert, ed. Michael Graetz (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University, 2002). There has also been discussion as to whether the blocks were cut by Jews or gentiles. The only compelling evidence that would suggest one way or the other is the Hanukkah woodcut in the 1593 edition, reproduced here on page 1, which shows a six-branched menorah (plus *shamash)* rather than the appropriate eight-branched model. It's difficult to imagine a Jewish artist making that mistake. The error was corrected in all subsequent editions.

8. Tkhines. See Chava Weissler's book about this important literature, *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Voices of Early Modern Jewish Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998). A new edition of a Yiddish *Seyder Tkhines,* the early women's prayer book, has just been published (2004) in English by Jewish Publication Society. First published in Amsterdam in 1648 it is here translated and introduced by Devra Kay. The books of *tkhines* were rather small and appeared in many editions, perhaps more than the *Minhogimbukh.*

9. Memorization and the transmission of knowledge. I thank Jean Baumgarten for reminding me of this aspect of Jewish learning. On the subject of language and learning, see his article "La littérature juive en langue yiddish: crise religieuse, culture vernaculaire et propagation de la foi" in *Annales* 51/2 (1996). Also see Jacob Neusner's *The Memorized Torah: The Mnemonic System of the Mishnah* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985).