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THE *ʾAGUR*: A HALAKHIC CODE FOR PRINT

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> So far as the mere imparting of information is concerned, no university has had any justification for existence since the popularization of printing in the fifteenth century.
>
> —Alfred North Whitehead

Abstract: *The* ʾAgur*—a relatively obscure and occasionally derided Jewish legal compendium of the late fifteenth century—represents the first halakhic work truly of the printed age, in that it was not simply a printed manuscript, a book that utilized the production value of the printing press without changes to its substance or presentation, but rather an original text, written by its author during his lifetime, to be precisely suited for the opportunities presented by print. Jacob Landau, the author, was wholly aware of the cultural ramifications of print and adapted his work to these new circumstances and possibilities. He created a text that could be used by both scholars and nonscholars and would appeal to a variety of geographically specific traditions. It was also the first Hebrew book to contain* haskamot*, which later were commonly used and even required in some Jewish communities. As the first halakhic book printed during its author's lifetime, justification was necessary for its very existence.*

The invention of the printing press and spread of movable type in fifteenth-century Europe radically transformed the nature of textual study. Written content would no longer be the right of the elite, an entitlement only of those privileged or sufficiently talented to gain access. The democratization of knowledge commenced with the ability to produce large numbers of copies of written materials relatively quickly and efficiently, and with the authors who directed and adapted their texts to the new nonscholarly audiences these texts would reach.[1] One such text was the *ʾAgur* and one such author was Jacob Landau.

1. Elizabeth Eisenstein most notably advanced this thesis in her seminal two-volume work, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Though some scholars criticized Eisenstein for ignoring the continuities between manuscript and print culture and for attributing too radical a role to the technology itself, her work also inspired a slew of studies that examine the cultural implications of print technology and its impact on the democratization of knowledge. For more on these debates see Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Eisenstein and Johns, "AHR Forum: How Revolutionary Was the Print Revolution?," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (February 2002): 84–128. This study accepts arguments from both sides: print was not the only factor that made knowledge more accessible; changes in writing style and the increased availability of paper

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The *ʾAgur* represents the first halakhic work specifically composed to take advantage of the new cultural circumstances of print. It was not simply a printed manuscript, a book that utilized the production value of the printing press without changes to its substance or presentation; rather, it was an original text, written by its author during his lifetime, to be precisely suited to the cultural implications and pedagogical opportunities of print. Jacob Landau, the author, was wholly aware of the potential of print and adapted his work to these new circumstances and possibilities. He recognized that print would expand the range of individuals with access to written content, and he accordingly adapted his work to the reading preferences and needs of these new audiences. Landau additionally understood that the technology of movable type had the potential to facilitate the standardization of Halakhah, the establishment of a common legal tradition to be studied across a variety of Jewish centers. Accordingly, he created a text that included a range of geographically specific Jewish legal traditions with the intention that it supersede those boundaries and establish itself as a standard halakhic guidebook.

This study addresses Landau's recognition of the cultural implications of the emergence of Hebrew print and the measures he took to create a text suited for the new circumstances. After placing Landau in the historical contexts of late medieval Ashkenaz and Italy, I will identify his textual innovations through comparison of the *ʾAgur* to the preceding prototypical codes, *Mishneh Torah* and *ʾArbaʿah turim*. I will explain the ramifications of Landau's textual ingenuity by his explicit statements in the paratexts regarding the opportunities print entailed. And lastly, through an analysis of the *ʾAgur*'s approbations, size, and table of contents I will demonstrate that the text was adapted to print and its intended use, and that Landau's contemporaries recognized the profound implications of these innovations.

The Book and Its Author

The *ʾAgur* is best classified as a code of Jewish law that encompasses a wide range of Jewish legal opinions and decisions.[2] Although Landau is not responsible for originating this genre of rabbinic literature (indeed, its two most prominent examples are the *Mishneh Torah* and the *ʾArbaʿah turim*), Landau worked

also contributed to the proliferation of more affordable books. Additionally, attempts to make knowledge more accessible to a wider audience predated the emergence of movable print in Europe and even after print, cultural ramifications took centuries to fully take root. Nonetheless, the technology of print and the adaptations of authors of their texts to new audiences facilitated the major transformation in knowledge production and dissemination that marks the early modern period.

2. Menahem Elon defines a code as a work that "aims to set forth the law in a definitive and organized fashion, and its conclusions are arrived at by theoretical analysis of the relevant material contained in the various literary sources of the law." Menahem Elon, *Jewish Law: History, Sources, Principles*, vol. 3, trans. Bernard Auerbach and Melvin J. Sykes (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), 1138. Codes will be more fully defined and differentiated from other genres, such as legal summaries, later in this study.

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within the models established by his predecessors, while also departing from them in purpose and style. Landau's *ʾAgur* was explicitly intended as a daily reference guide for both the learned and unlearned, and therefore encompassed both a larger range of opinions and also a shortened form.

Throughout his writings Jacob Landau frequently referred to himself as "Ha-Ashkenazi."[3] Though he did not live much of his life in German lands—according to Israel Yuval, Jacob and his father, Judah Loew, settled in Italy when Jacob was still a young child[4]—Landau evidently considered himself to be of Ashkenazic origin and tradition, so understanding the cultural history of late medieval Ashkenaz is vital to understanding Landau and his book.

The thirteenth through fifteenth centuries marked a period of increased geographic mobility for Jews in the Holy Roman Empire. In the aftermath of the Black Plague, multiple tragedies, persecutions, and expulsions befell Jews in German lands, displacing many communities and disrupting the long-established local character of religious practice. New regional and supraregional customs were established to help ensure uniform practice in new areas of residence.[5] At the same time, Christian society began to rely less on oral authority and more on words written on paper; in turn, Jewish culture, too, became increasingly textualized.[6] As a result of these demographic and cultural changes, Ashkenazic Jews invested unprecedented efforts in compiling, recording, and evaluating minhagim of various communities.[7] Two important examples of custom books from this

3. "The German."

4. Yuval based this assertion on Judah Landau's appearance as a rabbinic authority in Treviso at some point before 1460 as well as from the multiple portions of the *ʾAgur* in which Jacob Landau mentions the Ashkenazic minhagim (customs) he heard from his father. Israel Yuval, *Ḥakhamim be-doram: Ha-manhigut ha-ruḥanit shel yehudei Germaniah be-shelhe yeme ha-beynayim* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1998), 256–60. There are, however, additional instances when Landau explicitly introduced his discussion of an Ashkenazic minhag with, "I saw in Ashkenaz": *Sefer ʾagur* (Naples: 1490–92), f. 20v: ואני המחבר ראיתי באשכנז עושים ההפך שהחזן קורא בקול רם והקורא קורא בלחש. This evidence seems to indicate, contrary to Yuval's opinion, that Landau had spent significant time in Ashkenaz before making his way to Italy, and thus it is possible that he *saw* these customs practiced in his youth. Accordingly, Moses Herschler alternatively dated Jacob Landau's emigration to the mid-fifteenth-century rabbinic migration to Padua. *Sefer ha-ʾagur ha-shalem*, ed. Moses Herschler (Jerusalem: Boys' Town Jerusalem Press, 1960), 6. Landau asserted his Ashkenazic origin, but according to Joseph Colon, the Landau family was actually of French origin. See Joseph Colon, *ShUT haMaharYK ha-Ḥadashim*, ed. Eliahu Dov Pines (Jerusalem: Makhon Yerushalayim, 1984), no. 46, p. 217.

5. Mordechai Breuer, "Ha-semikhah ha-ʾAshkenazit," *Zion* 33 (1968): 15–46; Jeffrey Woolf, "Between Diffidence and Initiative: Ashkenazic Legal Decision-Making in the Late Middle Ages (1350–1500)," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 52, no. 1 (2001): 85–97; Yedidya Dinari, *Ḥakhme ʾAshkenaz be-shelhe yeme ha-beynayim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1984).

6. This was a long and uneven process. For more explanation see Talya Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud: Oral Torah as Written Tradition in Medieval Jewish Cultures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

7. For more on the role of these demographic and cultural changes in the writing of minhagim books, see Rachel Zohn Mincer, "The Increasing Reliance on Ritual Handbooks in Pre-Print-Era Ashkenaz," *Jewish History* 31, nos. 1–2 (2017): 103–28; Mincer, "Liturgical Minhagim Books: The Increasing Reliance on Written Texts in Late Medieval Ashkenaz" (PhD diss., Jewish Theological

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period are the *Sefer Maharil*, a record of the teachings of Jacob Moelin compiled posthumously by his students, and the *Leket yosher* of Joseph b. Moses, which contains descriptions of the life, customs, and rulings of Israel Isserlein. Though custom always featured in the determination of Jewish law, the extent to which it exerted authority significantly increased in Rhineland and France of the High Middle Ages.[8] In the thirteenth century, Meir of Rothenberg, for example, appealed to custom as a determining factor only in cases of disagreement between two legal authorities; by the fifteenth century, halakhists relied on common practice even when it was not attributable to a known legal source.[9]

Jacob Landau, born at the end of this generation, in early fifteenth-century German lands, imbibed the culture of his birthplace—especially the centrality of minhag, to which he would accord preferential weight throughout his work. And yet Landau did not write a standard minhag book. Though the *ʾAgur* shares elements of that genre, it is not framed around the teachings of one rabbi primarily, as are the *Sefer Maharil* and *Leket yosher*, for example.[10] Instead, the *ʾAgur* encompasses a breadth of opinions, which made it more like a code, a

Seminary, 2012). Mincer highlights the relationship between geographic mobility, textualization, and the recording of customs against an older historiography that emphasized the decline of German Jewry following the Black Plague. The older historiography held that rabbinic scholars of the period interpreted the persecutions and expulsions that befell Jews in the wake of the Black Plague as events that marked a break between their generation and the previous one, which they could not match in intellectual capacity or contradict in legal decision making. Consequently, Ashkenazic scholars of this period developed a low self-image that manifested itself in their comparatively hesitant rendering of legal judgments and reluctance to produce major legal codes or commentaries. The late medieval Ashkenazic rabbis preferred, instead, to write minhagim books that would not compete or be compared to the hallowed legacies of their predecessors. For more on this interpretation of the reason for the proliferation of minhagim books, see Woolf, "Between Diffidence and Initiative"; Dinari, *Ḥakhme Ashkenaz*, 9–55; Yuval, *Ḥakhamim be-doram*, 392–94. Another possibility that has not been advanced in the historical scholarship is the connection between the generally local nature of law in Germany and France during the period. For a sense of the non-Jewish context see John P. Dawson, "The Codification of the French Customs," *Michigan Law Review* 38, no. 6 (1940): 768.

8. Jeffrey Woolf, "The Life and Responsa of Rabbi Joseph Colon b. Solomon Trabotto (Maharik)" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1991), 162; Woolf, "The Authority of Custom in the Responsa of R. J. Colon (Maharik)," *Dine Israel* 19 (1997–1998): 43–73. For discussions of the role of custom in Halakhah see the following and the literature cited there: Dinari, *Ḥakhme Ashkenaz*, 190–228; Israel Ta-Shma, *Minhag Ashkenaz ha-kadmon* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), 16–21. See also Haym Soloveitchik, "'Religious Law and Change' Revisited," in *Collected Essays* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013), 1:258–77.

9. Woolf, "Authority of Custom," 49–50.

10. Rachel Mincer makes an important distinction between different types of minhagim books—liturgical manuals and "rabbi-centered" works (ritual manuals that cover the teachings of one rabbi primarily). Mincer, "Liturgical Minhagim Books," 2–3. The *ʾAgur* covers the breadth of opinions typical of these "rabbi-centered" works, but importantly is not focused on the customs of one individual.

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genre dominated by Sephardic authors.[11] Landau's decision to produce such a text, despite his Ashkenazic heritage, reflects the influence of the multicultural Italian context where the majority of his intellectual development took place.

Landau left his Ashkenazic birthplace for Italy sometime in his youth, and by the middle of the fifteenth century had settled in the northern Italian city of Pavia.[12] Northern Italy in this period witnessed large migrations of Jews from German lands, French territories, and the Iberian Peninsula, with their respective expulsions. The influx of Jews from these various places transformed the character of Italian Jewry, turning major cities into heterogeneous centers of merging cultures.[13] Rabbinic émigrés continued to teach and serve as halakhic authorities in various urban areas in Italy, and in many cases, surpassed their Italian Jewish contemporaries in learning and stature. One such individual was Joseph Colon (the Maharik). Colon emigrated from France to Italy in the early fifteenth century and spent time in various cities in northern Italy, where he encountered prominent Ashkenazic authorities and their pupils, and subsequently came to be influenced by Ashkenazic halakhic trends.[14]

11. Judah Galinsky argues that the increased importance of piety and the success of the talmudic schools in medieval Spain prompted Spanish scholars to produce a number of important halakhic codes and compendia: "On Popular Halakhic Literature and the Jewish Reading Audience in Fourteenth-Century Spain," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 98, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 305–37. See also Galinsky, "Ashkenazim in Sefarad: The Rosh and the Tur on the Codification of Jewish Law," *Jewish Law Annual* 16 (2006): 3–23; Ephraim Urbach, "The Ways of Codification: On the *Tur* of Jacob b. Asher" [in Hebrew], in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research: Jubilee Volume* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1980), 1–14; Judah Galinsky, "The Significance of Form: R. Moses of Coucy's Reading Audience and His *Sefer ha-Mizvot*," *AJS Review* 35, no. 2 (2011): 293–321. Of course, Ashkenazic scholars also produced codes. In northern France in particular there was an effort to produce works more accessible to the nonelite. For more on the regional distinctions of halakhic literature of the period see the important studies by Judah Galinsky: "Rabbis, Readers and the Paris Book Trade: Understanding French Halakhic Literature in the 13th-Century," in *Entangled Histories: Knowledge, Authority, and Transmission in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Cultures*, ed. Elisheva Baumgarten, Ruth Mazo Karras, and Katelyn Messler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 73–92; "Between Ashkenaz (Germany) and Tsarfat (France): Two Approaches toward Popularizing Jewish Law," in *Jews and Christians in Thirteenth-Century France*, ed. Elisheva Baumgarten and Judah Galinsky (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 77–92.

12. *Sefer ha-ʾagur ha-shalem*, Herschler, 6.

13. Moses Shulvass, *The Jews in the World of the Renaissance*, trans. Elvin I. Kose (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 3–5. According to the account of Elijah Capsali, the Ashkenazic population in northern Italy outnumbered the native Italian Jewish population; but this testimony, while certainly a reflection of the size of the German Jewish population in Italy, was not necessarily reality, as Capsali tended toward hyperbole in his communal descriptions. For more on the significance of the dispersion of Ashkenaz for halakhic writing see Edward Fram, *My Dear Daughter: Rabbi Benjamin Slonik and the Education of Jewish Women in Sixteenth-Century Poland* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2007), 22–32. For more on patterns of Jewish migration and settlement see Robert Bonfil, "Ashkenazim in Italy," in *Yiddish in Italia: Yiddish Manuscripts and Printed Books from the 15th to 17th Century*, ed. Chava Turniansky and Erika Timm (Milan: Associazione Italiana Amici dell' Universita di Gerusalleme, 2003), 219–20; Bonfil, "The History of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews in Italy," in *Moreshet Sepharad: The Sephardi Legacy*, vol. 2, ed. Haim Beinart (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), 217–39.

14. Daniel Carpi, "Ha-yehudim be-Padua be-tekufat ha-renesans (1369–1509)" (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 1967), 111.

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As one of the foremost rabbinic authorities of his generation, the Maharik transformed each yeshiva at which he taught into a center of talmudic learning.[15] During his tenure in Pavia, he met and studied with Jacob Landau; Colon's influence is seen in Landau's frequent citation of the Maharik's opinions.[16]

Another significant halakhic authority Jacob Landau encountered during that time was Judah Minz.[17] Minz was born in Ashkenaz early in the fifteenth century and died in Padua in 1509. He was a relative of Joseph b. Moses, the author of the *Leket yosher*, and possibly also the brother of Moses b. Eliezer ha-Levi Minz, one of the prominent students of Israel Isserlein.[18] Judah Minz was considered an influential authority in his own right, and one of the great Ashkenazic rabbis of northern Italy. Among his intellectual coterie was Judah Loew Landau, Jacob Landau's father, who was an elder statesman of the German Jewish community in Treviso. Judah Landau and Judah Minz frequently spoke to one another, seeking each other's advice on the resolution of communal disputes and legal conundrums. Jacob Landau also developed ties with his father's colleague, having spent time studying with Minz.[19]

Jacob Landau's immigration from Ashkenaz to northern Italy marks an important moment of cultural transition. He considered himself to be of Ashkenazic tradition, and relied heavily on the scholars of late medieval Ashkenaz, but he was also schooled by French and Italian rabbis in Italy. Indeed, like the other peripatetic scholars of his period, Landau encountered a relatively wide range of rabbinic personalities, as well as ideas—including science, metaphysics, and Kabbalah.[20] But while the first generation of Ashkenazic émigrés in Italy seemed to have adhered primarily to the Ashkenazic tradition, by the mid-fifteenth century, the subsequent generation (children of the original émigrés), as well as a new wave of immigrants, began to embrace this multicultural learning environment. For example, the Maharik, whose traditions were rooted in the French model, was heavily influenced by Ashkenazic halakhists throughout his travels in Italy. Such influence is evident in his favoring—both in his responsa and yeshiva curriculum—of the authority of the *ʾArbaʿah turim*.[21] Judah Messer Leon, a native Italian Jew, similarly argued for the importance of the

15. Arguably the most important city of the Maharik's residence was Mantua, as it was there that Colon penned a large number of his rabbinic responsa and studied closely with Judah Messer Leon. Legend had it that both Colon and Messer Leon's tenures in Mantua came to an end with a dispute that apparently culminated in both of their expulsions. Heinrich Graetz originally articulated this argument, though subsequent scholars, including Robert Bonfil, Jeffrey Woolf, and Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, have doubted its veracity.

16. Woolf, "Life and Responsa of Rabbi Joseph Colon," 46.

17. Carpi, "Ha-yehudim be-Padua," 113; years recorded by Elijah Capsali.

18. Ibid., 112–13.

19. Ibid., 123.

20. There are certainly important medieval exceptions to this, but scholars have shown that intellectual migration began to significantly increase in the early modern period. See David Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 23–55.

21. Woolf, "Life and Responsa of Rabbi Joseph Colon," 108–10.

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Tur; he even advocated for its acceptance as the authoritative code for all Jews in Italy.[22]

In this transitional period, when a new Jewish society composed of Jews of various origins and cultural traditions—German lands, the Iberian and Italian peninsulas, and French territories—was beginning to form, perhaps there was a sense that a new type of halakhic text needed to be written, one that would accommodate various traditions. Conceivably, Landau's *ʾAgur* was meant to achieve that goal. It is manifestly clear that increased intellectual exchange among Ashkenazic, Italian, and French Jewish scholars influenced the book's content; indeed, the *ʾAgur* represents an unprecedented effort to combine these various traditions in a single volume. But while Landau referenced authorities from each Jewish community among which he lived, he still gave preferential weight to Ashkenazic laws and customs, especially those of his father and Jacob Moelin. Landau also did not emphasize that his work was meant to supersede geographically specific traditions, though, as this study will later discuss, the text implies and signals such intention.

Landau's Textual Innovations

Jacob Landau's book is printed in quarto form on chancery paper.[23] The title page is a decorative woodcut pattern surrounding three cherubs and a peacock. The border frames the beginning of the introduction, which is then followed by the text itself, organized in 1440 sections arranged according to the first two of Jacob b. Asher's *ʾArbaʿah turim*, *Oraḥ ḥayim* and *Yoreh deʿah.* The table of contents, for the reader's reference, is printed at the end of the work.[24]

Jacob Landau's introduction to the *ʾAgur* is particularly revealing of the intent and nature of the book.[25] Here, Landau clearly expresses his methodology

22. Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds: The Life and Thought of Rabbi David ben Judah Messer Leon* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 27.

23. The book is 20cm wide.

24. *Sefer ʾagur*, f. 153r - f. 171, v. 22. Copies of the work are housed in libraries throughout the United States, Europe, and Israel, including Harvard University, Hebrew Union College, the Jewish Theological Seminary, Library of Congress, New York Public Library, British Library, Bodleian Library, Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, and National Library of Israel. There is a digital copy available on the National Library of Israel website.

25. According to Gerard Genette, paratexts—any extratextual aspect of a book, including the introduction—are "thresholds of interpretation" that help place a work within its cultural setting and provide insight into the intended meaning of a text and its overall purpose. Paratexts are thus not external to a text, but rather an internal part of it that helps readers reach greater levels of understanding. Although Genette identifies most paratextual elements as designed to entice people to buy and read a book, the introduction, or the "original preface" as Genette calls the authorial introduction, is a paratext whose most important function is to situate an author in the context of his work. The original preface, according to Genette, is thus a statement of the author's intent, which helps readers properly approach a text. Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 221. The introduction emerged in Hebrew texts around the tenth century, and throughout the medieval and early modern periods served as a vehicle for authors to write statements of purpose and methodology. The Hebrew introduction, *hakdamah*, also became a

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and objectives in a three-fold fashion. Regarding methodology, first, he asserts that his work contains a collection of all the opinions and discussions of the great rabbinic authorities, including specifically *Rif*, *Mishneh Torah*, *Mordekhai*, *Semag*, *ʿAmudei golah*, *ʾOr zaruʿah*, *Turim*, *Shibulei ha-leket*, *Rashba*, and *Rokeaḥ*. Second, it relates the customs of the great rabbis of Ashkenaz and France. Third, it cites the rabbis of his generation, and any authorities after the *Tur* whose opinions are not found in the above-mentioned works.[26]

Regarding the purpose of the text, Landau initially states that his work was intended for a particular student, a physician whose work prohibited him from intensively studying Halakhah as he desired. Though Landau employs the common rhetorical strategy of addressing a text to one specific individual, it is significant that his target was not the scholar, but rather an individual without sufficient time to study Halakhah.[27] As the language of the text (Hebrew) would have prevented the general public or those with no rabbinic education from reading the work, the likely intended audience was the Jewish educated layman, someone with knowledge of the rabbinic tradition but not an advanced Talmud scholar.[28] Landau also discussed three additional purposes for which his text could be used: as a guidebook for all halakhic opinions on a matter, as a source for a practical answer to a specific question, and as a reference work for a range of rabbinic opinions not cited in other materials.[29] Thus, it becomes clear from Landau's introduction that the *ʾAgur* did not need to be intensively studied; it could be used periodically for reference purposes to suit the reader's need.[30]

literary genre unto itself, with many authors, especially those of Spanish and Italian origin, writing their works in rhyme or poetry. Praise of God and the incorporation of biblical verses to express ideas and intent are also standard features of *hakdamot*. See Raphael Posner and Israel Ta-Shema, eds., *The Hebrew Book: An Historical Survey* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), 174.

26. *Sefer ʾagur*, f. 1r. For more on the relationship of the *ʾAgur* to other halakhic works see Yaakov Spiegel, "ʿAl sefer *ʾagur*," *Yerushatenu* 1 (2006): 172–95.

27. *Sefer ʾagur*, f. 1r. Landau specifies that this student was a physician and his time was primarily devoted to the study of philosophy and science; thus, this particular individual was hardly uneducated, but significantly, he was not well versed in Jewish legal matters.

28. There are indications that Hebrew literacy among Italian Jews started declining in the sixteenth century. See Kenneth Stow, "Writing in Hebrew, Thinking in Italian," in *Jewish Life in Early Modern Rome: Challenge, Conversion, and Private Life* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate/Variorum, 2007), 1–14. For more on literacy in general see Robert Bonfil, "Reading in the Jewish Communities of Western Europe in the Middle Ages," in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Gugliemo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 149–78.

29. *Sefer ʾagur*, f. 1r.

30. I do not wish to overstate the novelty of Landau's intended audience, as there were some preprint halakhic guides intended for the nonscholar. The closest parallel to the *ʾAgur* is perhaps Isaac of Corbeil's thirteenth-century code, *Sefer mizvot katan* (*Semak*), an abridgment of Moses of Coucy's *Sefer mizvot gadol* (*Semag*), which scholars consider a handbook. Nonetheless, as this study will later discuss, it is significant that Landau not only addressed his text to a more popular audience, he organized and produced the book with the technological means that would best enable his work to reach those individuals. For more on medieval halakhic works adapted to nonscholarly audiences, see Galinsky,

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To more fully understand the significance of Landau's intentions, it is useful to compare the *ʾAgur*'s introduction with that of Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*, the most significant halakhic code of the medieval period.[31] Landau certainly read *Mishneh Torah*, as he frequently cites it throughout the *ʾAgur*, and thus it is likely that he consciously compared his work to Maimonides's magnum opus. One major point of contrast between these texts is that unlike the *ʾAgur*, Maimonides's introduction contains philosophical musings, theoretical discussions, and enumeration of commandments, in addition to a pragmatic expression of his purpose in writing the book. Such breadth indicates that Maimonides sought to accomplish more than compile laws to be followed. As Isadore Twersky has argued, Maimonides's philosophy was in fact integrally intertwined with his halakhic works.[32] Another critical difference lies in Maimonides's and Landau's intended purposes for their texts. Maimonides's articulated intent was to create a work so comprehensive in its scope of Jewish law that it could replace all other sources of its kind. In fact, Maimonides explicitly claimed that he organized his work in an easy-to-memorize form, so that individuals could read and remember his book in place of studying the Oral Law.[33] According to the radical interpretation, Maimonides did not intend to merely supplement the Talmud and subsequent Jewish legal discussions, he meant to supplant them.[34] Like Landau, Maimonides stated that he hoped his text would increase Torah learning among all Jews, and the *Mishneh Torah* was, in its time, a more accessible halakhic work; Landau, however, sought to make his work even more readily available to different reading audiences.[35]

Jacob ben Asher's *Turim*, the other most significant code of the medieval period that Landau read, and upon which he based his *ʾAgur* in part, provides an

"The Significance of Form"; Galinsky, "On Popular Halakhic Literature"; Mincer, "Increasing Reliance on Ritual Handbooks."

31. I chose these two works as points of comparison as they are the most significant in the development of codificatory literature in the period. There were other works that could be classified as codes that were either more limited in scope or not well executed as a final source of the law.

32. See Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 356–515.

33. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, ed. Joseph Kafiah (Kiryat Ono: Mekhon Mishnat ha-Rambam, 1983), 46–47.

34. Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides: Life and Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 184–89. Halbertal distinguished between two different interpretations of the purpose of Maimonides's work: (1) The moderate view argues that the *Mishneh Torah* is a summary of Halakhah; (2) The radical view argues that the *Mishneh Torah* replaces Halakhah. In the introduction, it is ambiguous what Maimonides really intended. Halbertal argues, however, that he thinks Maimonides's true intention was radical but he had to disguise it with a more moderate interpretation (194). See also Shamma Friedman, "Ha-Rambam ve-ha-Talmud," *Dine Israel* 26–27 (2009–2010): 221–37.

35. On the implications of the popular bent of the *Mishneh Torah* see Yaakov Levinger, *Darkhei ha-maḥshavah ha-hilkhatit shel ha-Rambam: Meḥkar ʿal ha-metodah shel Mishneh Torah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1965); Binyamin Z. Benedikt, *Ha-Rambam lelo stiyah min ha-Talmud* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1988).

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additional point of comparison on the continuum of halakhic literature.[36] The *Turim* was explicitly intended for a different purpose than the *Mishneh Torah*: it was meant to organize the laws, not to replace them.[37] In addition to stating his purpose, Jacob also outlined his method of organization in the introduction, which speaks to his main goal of elucidating, and not deciding, the law.[38] However, the most distinct point of divergence from the *Mishneh Torah* was that the *Turim* cited and elucidated sources, while Maimonides eliminated the lengthy discourse and conflicting opinions that led him to his conclusions. Also, in contrast to Maimonides, Jacob b. Asher claimed that he did not base his legal decisions on his own logic, but rather on the opinion of his father, Asher ben Yeḥiel. The *Tur*, like the *Mishneh Torah*, appealed to broader audiences; nonetheless, it was still not intended to be a quick-reference guide, a simple and straightforward text, nor would it have feasibly been used as such during the time of its composition.[39] In the medieval period, Hebrew manuscripts were personal documents copied by scholars for individual use.[40] Manuscripts had some finding aids, such as rubrication and sometimes tables of contents, but these features were

36. For more on the *Tur* specifically, see Judah Galinsky, "ʾArbaʿah turim ve-ha-siferut ha-hilkhatit shel Sefarad ba-me'ah ha-14: ʾAspektim historiyim, sifrutiyim ve-hilkhatiyim" (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 1999).

37. The *Tur* is considered a code and not a legal summary because it does not include talmudic sources and dispute, though it does offer citations and a sense of halakhic discourse, unlike Maimonides's work. Judah Galinsky argues that Jacob b. Asher composed a code (an unusual genre for Ashkenazic scholars) in order to reach the Spanish rabbinic leadership, who wrote primarily in that model. According to Galinsky, the fourteenth century witnessed a particular increase in the production of codes as a result of both the success of the talmudic academies and the increase in the number of individuals capable of composing such works (higher levels of literacy and increased religious fervor). Galinsky's analysis of manuscript sources of the *Tur* shows that in the first fifty years following its publication its audience was limited to scholars themselves writing works on those subjects. Toward the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth century, however, the work began to achieve popularity in reading communities of Spain, North Africa, Germany, and Italy. Over the course of the fifteenth century, it reached increasing popularity in those areas. Galinsky, "ʾArbaʿah turim ve-ha-siferut ha-hilkhatit shel Sefarad." Native Italian rabbis, such as Judah and David Messer Leon, for example, adopted the *Tur* as the authoritative halakhic resource. See Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds*.

38. Jacob b. Asher, *ʾArbaʿah turim* (Tel Aviv: Mekhon Shirat Devora, 1993), vol. 1, introduction (pages not numbered).

39. According to Judah Galinsky, the first section, *ʾOraḥ ḥayim*, covering matters of daily relevance (prayers, blessings), was meant for the broadest audience, a guide for the rabbi, preacher, or layman. The second section, *Yoreh deʿah*, was meant to be a code for local rabbis, to help them decide ritual matters. And the last two sections, *ʾEven ha-ʿezer* and *Ḥoshen mishpat*, covering civil and marital law, were intended for judges. Galinsky, "ʾArbaʿah turim ve-ha-siferut ha-hilkhatit shel Sefarad." A comment of Judah Minz emphasizes the popular use and elite rejection of it:
מהר"י מינץ גילה לנו על רבנים מסוימים באיטליה "שאינם רוצים אפילו לקרות בטור" אורח חיים ונותנין טעם שהבעלי בתים לומדים אותו.

R. Judah Minz, *she'elot u-teshuvot* (Krakow: 1881), chap. 15, 30v.

40. Malachi Bet-Arié, "The Codicological Data-base of the Hebrew Paleography Project: A Tool for Localising and Dating Hebrew Medieval Manuscripts," in *Hebrew Studies Colloquium*, ed. Diana R. Smith and Peter S. Salinger (London: British Library Occasional Papers, 1991), 170.

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not prominent aspects of the works because scholars familiar with the material could already, without much effort, find subjects under question.[41] In printed texts, however, where the readership might not have encountered the text before and prior familiarity could not be assumed, such features became selling points advertised on title pages—printers and publishers boasted that the tools in their printed works allowed broader audiences to access classical and traditional manuscripts.[42] Landau understood the new cultural circumstances of his time and took the initiative not only to reformat existing authoritative works but to create a new one that would condense the law, therefore making it more accessible to nonscholars and suitable for the new realities brought about by print.

The introductions to the ʾ*Agur*, *Mishneh Torah*, and *Turim* thus make clear the ʾ*Agur*'s innovative purposes: to be used in new ways by an expanded audience. Landau meant for the ʾ*Agur* to be studied by those with advanced rabbinical education and those without, to be used as a reference manual or a comprehensive guide, and to be disseminated in a variety of Jewish communities, goals that could realistically be achieved in his lifetime, due to the new method with which Landau chose to produce his text.

Analysis of the structure and methodology of these three texts shows that Landau crafted the style and presentation of his text in accordance with, and to help accomplish, these goals. The ʾ*Agur*'s length and scope are considerably shorter than those of the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Tur*. Maimonides covered all aspects of Oral Law in his code, even laws no longer relevant in his period, including the laws of Temple service and animal sacrifices. Jacob b. Asher excluded these no-longer-applicable laws and accordingly limited his discussions to his ʾ*Arbaʿah turim* (literally "four columns"): ʾ*Oraḥ ḥayim*, *Yoreh deʿah*, ʾ*Even haʿezer*, and *Ḥoshen mishpat*. These four sections organized the practical laws into two categories concerning ritual matters (ʾ*Oraḥ ḥayim* and *Yoreh deʿah*) and two concerning laws of business, marriage, and divorce (ʾ*Even haʿezer* and *Ḥoshen mishpat*).[43] But Landau's guide is even further condensed; it is limited to only the first two of Jacob b. Asher's four columns. Such reduced form meant that the ʾ*Agur* only included practical everyday laws, such as those covering prayers, blessings, Sabbath, holidays, kashrut, and ritual purity. Excluded are laws decided by rabbinic courts, not lay individuals themselves, such as those regarding business, marriage, and divorce. Landau expanded the accessibility of

41. Ann Blair makes this argument for medieval Latin Europe: *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 33–46. Mary Carruthers also argues that the design of medieval manuscripts was meant to aid in memory—not quick reference: *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 242. For examples of tables of contents and finding aids in medieval Hebrew manuscripts see Yaakov Spiegel, *ʿAmudim be-toldot ha-sefer haʿivri: Ketivah ve-haʿatakah* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2005), 523–64.

42. Blair, *Too Much to Know*, 53–54.

43. This division allowed the *Tur* to target and reach a variety of audiences, especially rabbis, preachers, and judges. See Galinsky, "ʾArbaʿah turim ve-ha-siferut ha-hilkhatit shel Sefarad."

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his work by keeping the *ʾAgur* relatively short and focused. This increased its readability and appeal to nonscholarly individuals, especially those looking for brief answers to halakhic matters of daily relevance.[44]

An examination of a cross section of laws treated in the *Mishneh Torah*, *Tur*, and *ʾAgur* further demonstrates Landau's originality. In this instance the laws of Hanukah, as a somewhat short and self-contained chapter in Jewish law, provide a useful point of contrast.

In his section on the laws of Hanukah, Maimonides does not simply enumerate the laws; rather, he introduces the ordinances with a discussion of the historical and philosophical underpinnings of the holiday. Only after having framed the laws in such fashion does he proceed to address practical halakhic concerns: who is obligated to light candles, how many candles should be lit, and where exactly one should light. These discussions reflect on and summarize the talmudic discourse concerning the holiday, and give a practical bottom line to be followed in each case. Maimonides, however, neither cites his sources nor explains the methodology whereby he arrived at his conclusions. A closer examination of his opinions concerning the requisite time frame for lighting candles illustrates this point. In this portion of his text, Maimonides plainly states the ideal time as sunset, and the final time as the point in the evening when people finish conducting their business in the marketplace.[45] He does not include in this discussion alternative opinions or an explanation for his conclusions. Thus, Maimonides's methodology can be summarized as follows: he places the holiday in its context, offers his philosophical understanding of it, and then states its legal practicalities.

Jacob b. Asher, on the other hand, eschews philosophical introduction and instead begins his discussion of Hanukah with an explanation of legal matters. The nature of his presentation of the law becomes clear upon examination of his opinion about the ideal time for lighting candles. Jacob states what he believed the law to be: the obligation to light begins at the end of sunset and continues until a half hour into the night. However, if one forgets to light during that period, the commandment can still be fulfilled until the morning. At the same time, Jacob cites Maimonides and juxtaposes his opinion to his own, and explains the logic by which he, Jacob, reached his conclusion. This kind of discussion cannot be found in the *Mishneh Torah*. In this specific case, he explains, a decision was rendered according to the opinion of Isaac b. Judah and Tosafot.[46] Here we see the fundamental differences between Maimonides's treatment of these laws and

44. Of course, the same thing that made it appealing to some individuals drew criticism from others. For more on criticism of printed halakhic guides in a later period see Elchanan Reiner, "The Ashkenazi Elite at the Beginning of the Modern Era: Manuscript versus Printed Book," *Polin* 10 (1997): 85–98.

45. *Mishneh Torah* (Kiryat Ono: Mekhon Mishnat ha-Rambam, 1983), 868–69.

46. This opinion held that the sages of the Talmud mentioned a specific time for lighting candles because they lit them outside; after the point when people ceased to walk in the marketplace, the candles would not serve the intended purpose of publicizing the miracle. However, in the time of Tosafot and the *Tur*, people would light candles in their home, where the other members of their family

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Jacob's: unlike the *Mishneh Torah*, the *Tur* explicitly provides citations, conflicting opinions, and logical reasoning for the conclusion drawn.[47]

The ʾAgur's analysis of the same set of laws is similar in content and style to the *Tur*, but shorter and more clearly presented. Like the *Tur*, the ʾAgur does not mention the historical context of Hanukah; rather, the text begins with legal matters of practical relevance. In discussing the ideal time to light the candles, Landau first cites the ultimate conclusion: if necessary, the candles can be lit until the morning. In the same fashion as the *Tur*, Landau then contrasts his opinion with that of Maimonides, quoting the same portion of the *Mishneh Torah* mentioned in the *Tur*. Landau additionally cites the Tosafot that led him to his conclusion. It is possible that Landau copied this entire section straight from the *Tur*, as it reads almost like a condensed version, and Landau explains in his introduction that he did not always specify his citations of the *Tur* because he relied so heavily on it.[48] But in accordance with Landau's intention to cite as many authorities as possible, he also adds to the *Tur*'s discussion by quoting the *Sefer ha-miẓvot* and Asher b. Yeḥiel, the Rosh.[49] This specific example demonstrates Landau's terseness combined with an increased (albeit relatively so in this case) breadth of opinions cited.[50]

The comparison of the treatment of the laws of Hanukah illustrates the characteristics distinguishing the ʾAgur from its predecessors: it is condensed, with clearer explanations and more rabbinic opinions. Maimonides purposely did not cite any of his sources; Jacob b. Asher cited some of his sources, but they are relatively limited in scope; Landau, by contrast, cited and incorporated a larger number of opinions but in briefer and more easily understood forms. Landau thus not only specifically intended that his text reach nonscholarly audiences, he made his text more meaningful and intelligible to these new readers through textual innovations.

Two additional aspects of the ʾAgur distinguish this text in important ways from the works of Maimonides and Jacob b. Asher: the ʾAgur incorporated opinions from a variety of Jewish communities and relied more often on minhag as a basis for legal determination. Indeed, the ʾAgur was not limited to the Halakhah of one geographically specific tradition, but rather it included a range of Ashkenazic, Italian, and French legal opinions. An example of the ʾAgur's scope is the discussion of *hoẓa'at Shabbat*, the laws of carrying on the

could see them at any point in the night. Therefore, in that period, the time for lighting could extend until the morning. *ʾArba'ah turim*, 4:622–24.

47. Though he did not mention the exact place where the opinions cited appear, not even when he quotes his father's opinions.

48. *Sefer ʾagur*, f. 1v.

49. Ibid., f. 103r. The Rosh was Jacob b. Asher's father, the default authority on whom Jacob b. Asher relied. Thus, it is not surprising that Jacob b. Asher did not actually cite his father's opinion in this discussion; it was already implicit.

50. It is important to note that Landau did not always include necessary details of the law. He sometimes referenced larger discussions in the *Tur* instead of summarizing them. In those instances, one would have to turn directly to the *Tur* for a comprehensive understanding of the law.

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Sabbath. Here Landau quotes and contrasts the Ashkenazic custom of not wearing sandals tied a certain way on Shabbat with the more lenient Italian practice. Landau then renders a decision according to the ruling of Joseph Colon (the Maharik): it is forbidden to wear these shoes on the Sabbath.[51] In this one instance, Landau juxtaposes *minhag Ashkenaz* with *minhag Italiah*, and ultimately decides the law according to the Maharik, whose opinion was aligned with the Ashkenazic custom. The *Mishneh Torah* and the *Tur* do not include such a geographical range of sources, nor Landau's extensive reliance on minhag.[52] Thus, the *ʾAgur*'s mixing of cultural opinions and its greater reliance on minhag further distinguishes it from other halakhic codes. What remains to be determined is whether Landau's modes of creation were specifically adapted to the new ramifications of print.

Meant for Print?

Perhaps the most significant cultural shift of Landau's lifetime was Gutenberg's invention of the printing press and the emergence of movable type in Europe in the middle of the fifteenth century. Landau was aware of these new ways to put words on paper,[53] and, more significantly, took the opportunity to exploit them to reach new reading audiences and provide them with a Jewish legal resource that was shorter in length and easier to read and understand than the existing halakhic codes. But are these connections mere coincidences? Did Landau in fact write the *ʾAgur* with the intention to have it printed?

In 1470 the first Hebrew press opened in Rome. Shortly thereafter, Hebrew printing spread throughout Italy to Reggio di Calabria, Piove di Sacco, Mantua, Ferrara, Bologna, and Soncino. The first works produced by these presses were primarily classical works of the Bible, biblical commentaries, liturgy, and classic halakhic texts and commentaries.[54] Jews embraced the practical value of this new technology: it allowed production of multiple copies of the same book at once in a less expensive form. Although the vast majority of printed works consisted of classical texts that had previously circulated in manuscript form, almost immediately after the beginning of Hebrew print contemporary authors recognized the potential of the presses for distributing their own works. Jacob Landau was among the first of such individuals; the *ʾAgur* was printed in the last decade of the fifteenth century.

51. *Sefer ʾagur*, f. 44v.

52. For examples of Landau's reliance on minhag see *Sefer ʾagur*, f. 5r; 12r; 13v; 38r; 43r; 80v.

53. Or parchment. Paper was not the only written medium of the period.

54. On the basis of the extant incunables, A. K. Offenberg argues that the Bible and biblical commentaries accounted for the largest share of Hebrew printed book production; second were books of rabbinic literature; and all other types of literature, including liturgy, the Haggadah, philosophy, medicine, math, and history, made up the balance of Hebrew print production. A. K. Offenberg, *A Choice of Corals: Facets of Fifteenth-Century Hebrew Printing* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1992), 89. There is debate among scholars as to which press first began operation, as the earliest printed books were not dated. Offenberg believes that the first Hebrew printing began in Rome in 1470. The first dated Hebrew work, however, appeared in 1475 in Reggio di Calabria.

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Indeed, Landau was eminently familiar with the business of print. In 1487, he and Joseph Gunzenhauser together entered into an agreement with two bankers[55] to establish the first Hebrew printshop in Naples.[56] Naples was then particularly hospitable toward Hebrew printing, as its king, Ferrante I, had issued policies that allowed for a fair degree of economic freedom and Jewish toleration. Ferrante I even exempted the book trade from taxes.[57] Such favorable circumstances allowed for the establishment and success of the Gunzenhauser printshop.[58]

Between 1487 and 1492, the Gunzenhauser press produced fourteen texts, including an edition of the Psalms, books of the Bible, biblical commentaries, and Landau's *ʾAgur*. Landau worked as a proofreader in the print house and thus saw firsthand the profound ramifications of the press and movable type. He even remarked on the newness of the technology in his colophon to Gunzenhauser's book of Psalms:

> I, the undersigned, come to excuse myself. Having been appointed to superintend this work, to correct the book daily according to the custom of those who are engaged in this art, I say if errors are found in the punctuation of the text, they are due to two causes. One is that we who are engaged in this art have only recently taken it up as beginners, and that our fathers had no idea of this art. It has always been recognized that every beginning is difficult and we have had not as yet sufficient time to practice thoroughly as we ought in the matter of vowel-points. The second reason is that in spite of our exertions we have not succeeded in finding the requisite manuscript sources. Hence if errors are found, they are few, when compared with the other books, which have hitherto been printed: more especially will few mistakes be found in Kimḥi's commentary. The books, however, which follow the Psalter will be more correct with the help of Him who ordains all work…. Thus says the man who was appointed corrector of the work, the least of the disciples, Jacob Barukh son of … R. Judah Landau … a German who is now sojourning here at Naples.[59]

In this colophon, Landau offers two reasons for mistakes made in typesetting: the newness of print and scarcity of manuscript sources. Such grasp of the difficulties of gaining expertise in an art so recently established shows Landau's familiarity

55. Manuelle de Cava and Elia Volghieri.

56. Joshua Bloch, *Hebrew Printing in Naples* (New York: New York Public Library, 1942); Offenberg, *A Choice of Corals*, 90. The scholarly consensus holds that the record of this agreement marks the first Hebrew print house in Naples and the "magister Jacob hebreo" and "magister Josep hebreo" mentioned in the notarial document are undoubtedly Jacob Landau and Joseph Gunzenhauser.

57. Bloch, *Hebrew Printing in Naples*, 4–9. One of the most important of Ferrante I's laws was his exemption of the book trade from taxes, a ruling seen in the privilege granted by the Regia Camera (royal court) to David Bono, a Jew from Naples, on May 10, 1491.

58. The Soncino family established a print house in Naples shortly after the Gunzenhauser press began operation. Although some scholars have supposed that there were more than two printshops in Naples in this short period of time, Offenberg determines through analysis of the different types used that there were only two: Gunzenhauser and Soncino.

59. Text and translation found in Bloch, *Hebrew Printing in Naples*, 15. The original text of the colophon is reproduced in G. B. De-Rossi, *Annales Hebraeo-typographici*, sec. XV (Parma, 1795), 48–49.

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not only with the technical aspects of print but also with its cultural potential. Though not explicitly stated, Landau's emphasis on finding the right manuscript copies implies recognition that print could provide a means to aid in halakhic standardization, a concept not fathomed by Landau's father's generation. Of course, there were many mechanisms of textual standardization before print—Torah scrolls, for example, are highly standardized manuscripts—but the technology of print made textual standardization easier and cheaper. Unlike the vagaries that could occur from one manuscript to subsequent copies, a printed work would, in theory at least, be identical no matter how many copies were produced.[60] Print was a means through which the variety of halakhic discourse could be consolidated and preserved.[61]

That Landau himself printed his *ʾAgur*, sometime between 1490 and 1492, most forcefully demonstrates that he knew how to use this new technology and that he was aware of the capacity of print to change how knowledge was disseminated.[62] Landau not only created a text that was adapted to the needs of new audiences through its simplified legal discourse and inclusion of a variety of geographically specific traditions, he produced that text with the technological means most suited to his goals, which would allow for wide distribution through increased production volume. Though it cannot be conclusively established that Landau designed and wrote the *ʾAgur* with the express purpose of accessing the benefits of the printing press, the argument for such a finding is further supported through an analysis of certain elements of the book, specifically the inclusion of rabbinic approbations, its reduced size, and its table of contents.

Paratextual Analysis

The rabbinic approbations (*haskamot*) Landau included in the *ʾAgur* fundamentally distinguish the book from many other compilations of Jewish law. Indeed, the *ʾAgur* is the first Hebrew book to contain these endorsements, which were later commonly used and even required in certain Jewish communities before a book would be accepted. Despite the ubiquity of rabbinic approbations in

60. Of course, it did not always turn out that way. For more on correction after print see Anthony Grafton, *The Culture of Correction in Renaissance Europe* (London: British Library, 2011); D. F. McKenzie, "Printers of the Mind: Some Notes on Bibliographical Theories and Printing-House Practices," in *Making Meaning: "Printers of the Mind" and Other Essays*, ed. Peter D. McDonald and Michael F. Suarez (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

61. For thorough analysis of the impact of print on halakhic literature see Tamara Morsel-Eisenberg, "The Organization of *Halakhic* (Jewish Legal) Knowledge in the Early Modern Period: *Ashkenazic* Responsa as a Case Study" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2018). I thank Tamara for reading drafts of this article and having many discussions with me on the subject.

62. There is no imprint date on the first edition of the *ʾAgur*. Aryeh Tauber, in *Meḥkarim bibliografim* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1932), 53–54, argues that the *ʾAgur* was not actually printed during Landau's lifetime. Tauber based this conclusion on three parts of the text that say, "I the compiler found in the words of the author." However, these sections do not appear in the first printed edition, suggesting that the first edition was printed during Landau's lifetime and a compiler of a later edition added those portions. Yitzhak Yudlov placed the date at 1490: "Mi hu ha-ḥakham ha-posek ha-ʾitalki," *Italiah* 10 (1993): 11.

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later centuries, the circumstances prompting their origin remain obscure. The first of two theories argues that competition between the Gunzenhauser and Soncino printshops in Naples prompted Gunzenhauser to seek advertisement for the quality of his printed texts. Gunzenhauser hoped the inclusion of approbations from notable rabbis would increase his sales.[63] The second theory suggests a connection between the Christian practice of including Latin approbations and the origins of the Jewish practice.[64] Although both theories are plausible, neither of them has been sufficiently substantiated, nor do they address the question of why approbations first appear specifically in the *ʾAgur*.

Perhaps a new theory can be advanced: Landau purposefully included the approbations to gain the *ʾAgur*—a code that departed from the models established by its predecessors—acceptance in Jewish communities. Landau wanted to sell and establish the authority of his code in a variety of Jewish communities, but its innovations in substance and design could prove obstacles to this goal. Landau needed to garner authoritative praise, advertisement, and support for his text. Additionally, as one of the first books printed while its author was still alive, some justification was necessary for its very existence.[65] The approbations additionally served that purpose.[66]

The rabbis gathered by Landau and probably also by the printer/publisher Gunzenhauser[67] represent an elite and learned coterie of individuals from a variety of Jewish centers.[68] The well-known Messer Leons—Judah and his son David[69]—and Jacob ben David Provenẓali[70] wrote approbations for the text, as did Ben Ẓion ben Rafael, Isaac ben Samuel Ḥayim ha-Sefardi, Moses ben Shem Tov of the Ibn Ḥabib family,[71] Solomon Ḥayim ben Yeḥiel ha-Cohen,

63. Mark Hurvitz, "The Rabbinic Perception of Print as Depicted in Haskamot and Responsa" (rabbinic thesis, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, 1978), 12.

64. Meir Benayahu, *Haskamah u-reshut be-defusei Veneẓiah* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1971); David Werner Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books in Italy: Beginning Chapters in the History of the Hebrew Printing Press* (Philadelphia: J. H. Greenstone, 1909); Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds*, 268–69.

65. Though there is some dispute concerning this matter, it seems Judah Messer Leon's *Nofet ẓufim* was the first book printed during its author's lifetime and the *ʾAgur* the second. The *ʾAgur* was certainly the first halakhic text to be printed in its author's lifetime.

66. Classical texts did not need approbations, but a new work, written by an unknown author, may have needed outside approval in order to establish authority.

67. Gunzenhauser was both a printer and a publisher, as much of the financial backing for his projects came from his own pocket. Bloch, *Hebrew Printing in Naples*.

68. For more on the *haskamot* and these individuals see Yudlov, "Mi hu ha-ḥakham," 9–17; Spiegel, '*Amudim be-toldot ha-sefer ha-ʾivri*, 4:115–17.

69. Judah Messer Leon's son David was an important scholar in his own right who studied with his father and many other rabbinic authorities of his day.

70. Jacob Provenẓali is famous for a responsum he wrote to David ben Judah Messer Leon encouraging him to pursue his secular studies. This responsum shows Jacob Provenẓali's status as a rabbinic authority—he was sought out for answers to difficult questions—and his understanding of the cultural atmosphere of Italian Jewry in this period. Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds*, 43–44.

71. Moses ben Shem Tov ibn Ḥabib was also a learned proofreader at the Gunzenhauser print shop; see Bloch, *Hebrew Printing in Naples*, 9–10.

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and Netanel ben Levi of Jerusalem.[72] The imprimaturs of this spectrum of rabbinic authorities from Italy, Spain, and Provence confirmed Landau as a halakhic authority and the clarity, accuracy, and usefulness of his text. Interestingly, in light of Landau's background, none of the approbations came from scholars of Ashkenazic origin, though Italians David and Judah Messer Leon followed Ashkenazic Halakhah.[73] The combination of Italian and Sephardic approbations for this Ashkenazic-centric text speaks to Landau's adaptation to the composite nature of his community and to his desire to gain recognition from each of these elements, as an analysis of the approbations suggests.

A common theme in many of the approbations is praise of Landau's ability to determine Halakhah: his breadth of knowledge and his respect for the system. The *haskamah* written by Netanel ben Levi, for example, commends Landau along these lines: "Regarding most of them [the decisions] he [Jacob Landau] was inclined toward being strict, and he did not exaggerate regarding the laws of the holidays and festivals."[74] Netanel ben Levi forewarns, lest anyone worry, that Landau did not write the book to argue for a more lenient approach to Halakhah; rather, it was appropriately stringent. Netanel additionally stresses that the book should be purchased because its owners and their children would benefit from owning such a text. The explicit encouragement for people to buy the book supports interpretation of the *haskamot* as advertisement for Landau's project: not only is Landau a valid authority, his text will have longevity and will be a valuable addition to a family's library. With similar perspective, Judah Messer Leon's *haskamah* states: "It [the *ʾAgur*] is a composition which presents the pleasing sayings of the customs and halakhic determination—halakhot that are correctly stringent. And therefore I have placed my signature on this honeycomb, these words of pleasantness."[75]

Jacob Provenẓali offers a different sort of praise, highlighting the importance of Landau's project: "[A text] such as this has not been written in many years: a

72. This is Netanel Trabot (Levi is of Jerusalem, not Netanel, a member of a French rabbinic family). See Henri Gross, *Gallia Judaica: Dictionnaire géographique de la France d'après les sources rabbiniques* (Amsterdam: Philo, 1969), 219–21.

73. For more on the legal rulings of David and Judah Messer Leon, see Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds*. The absence of scholars of Ashkenazic origin can be explained in a few possible ways. First, Landau might have thought that the praise of authorities outside of his Ashkenazic circle would help in garnering appeal for his book from a wider range of Jews, including the Sephardic community, as the *ʾAgur* primarily contains Ashkenazic customs and would naturally appeal to that audience even without a confirmatory approval by its rabbis. It is also possible that at the time there were no prominent Ashkenazic scholars in Naples from whom to seek approbation. This theory is somewhat unlikely, as we know there was a sizable community of German Jews in Naples in the late fifteenth century. David Abulafia, "The Role of the Jews in the Cultural Life of the Aragonese Kingdom of Naples," in *Gli ebrei in Sicilia: Dal tardoantico al Medioevo*, ed. Nicolò Bucaria (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1998), 35–53. Most likely, the approbations of David and Judah Messer Leon provided enough confirmatory approval for Ashkenazic audiences.

74. *Sefer ʾagur*, f. 185r.

75. Ibid., f. 181r.

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collection of desirable things and decisions testifying to much talmudic discourse."[76] Though Provenẓali does not note the role of print in the creation of Landau's work or recognize the originality of its intended purpose, it is still significant that Provenẓali notes that such a comprehensive text—indeed a legal code—had not been produced in many years. Provenẓali thus recognized that Landau's project was unique in its time.

Another recurring motif in the *haskamot* is the value of the *ʾAgur*'s clarity and breadth. Ben Ẓion ben Rafael addresses this point:

> The honorable Rabbi Jacob Landau, who has devoted his spirit to write a composition that collects, includes, and aggregates wisdom from the majority of the decisors and presents it to all who seek God. For within it [the *ʾAgur*] one will find a balm for his intellectual spirit and a cure for himself and his flesh. And I have read it and found in it completely favorable things and there is no blemish in it; and on it the Master of all Money will rejoice. And the Lord above will strengthen his hand among the mighty to increase Torah in Israel.[77]

Here Ben Ẓion ben Rafael notes that the *ʾAgur* would help increase knowledge among the Jewish people because it is a comprehensive work that could reach individuals lacking in halakhic knowledge. Another *maskim* notes the value of this book's collection of opinions, and its possible role as a text that would supersede others: "The master, Rabbi Jacob Landau, has written and brought for us a book on the decisions on the daily service and of the festivals and decisions regarding prohibitions and permissions. He gathers and collects all the opinions of most of the writers and adds to it jewels of his mouth, extended to be stringent and not to be lenient. And from now on I rely upon it to teach the children of Israel."[78] Interestingly, the author of this *haskamah* was a Sephardic Jew. His acceptance of the authority of Landau's text, and his reliance on it as an educational manual, represents a merging of geographically specific traditions, which accords with Landau's intention for the text to be considered authoritative by Ashkenazic, Italian, and Sephardic Jews.[79] A second Sephardic scholar, the renowned poet and grammarian Moshe ben Shem Tov ibn Ḥabib, makes the same point, and even brings it one step further by praising Landau's role in the establishment of a standardized Halakhah:

> The thirsty one was brought to the waters of the fountains of salvation, to a fixed Halakhah—Who can instruct knowledge? Who can understand oral

76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. This is an expansion of something that began with the Rosh and the *Tur*, works written by Ashkenazim that became accepted by many Sephardim. As Galinsky has shown, this is the main reason for the *Tur*'s publishing success at the beginning of the print era. See Galinsky, "'And This Sage Merited More than Any Other, for All Studied His Books': On the Distribution of Jacob b. Asher's "Arba'ah Turim" from the Time of Its Writing until the End of the Fifteenth Century," *Sidra: A Journal for the Study of Rabbinic Literature* (2004): 25–45.

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> tradition? Give please honor through the Lord, God of Israel; for God redeemed Jacob from confusion of the doubts. And you should take for yourself the word that God sent Jacob, and may that restore the well-being of your soul. And this book contains all the richness of straight legal reasonings, chosen from the best of the depths of sound and good thinking, which come up from this center post of the branches of the menorah: the time-bound laws, the prohibitions regarding food, and the laws of ritual purity and *mikvaʾot*. Of good fortune is the one who possesses this exalted work, during his [mis]fortunes and sufferings; of good fortune is the nation for whom this is so.[80]

This *haskamah* is significant because Ibn Ḥabib equates a fixed Halakhah, and specifically the *ʾAgur*, with the coming of redemption. Thus, according to Ibn Ḥabib, Landau's text did not just clarify halakhic discussions; Landau was uniquely blessed with clarity of insight necessary to establish a set of uniform practices. Though not explicitly mentioned in Ibn Ḥabib's *haskamah*, print—the new art with which Landau was familiar through his work as proofreader at Gunzenhauser's print shop—is an important factor in this equation.[81] Realistically, a standardized Halakhah could be realized only through print—the inherently limited number of manuscripts that could be produced by scribal hand prevented the establishment of textual uniformity that could extend beyond a tiny, insular community. Though printed texts were not free from error, the same version of a single text could be widely disseminated in many Jewish centers. Print enabled the production of cheaper and smaller books that could easily be transported. One text could be established as *the* text from which practice should be based. Ibn Ḥabib's *haskamah* is testimony that both Landau and his reader understood that due to its content and the means of its production the *ʾAgur* could become the standard Jewish legal resource.[82]

In addition to the *haskamot*, and aside from its substantive content, other aspects of the *ʾAgur* attest to Landau's awareness of the possibilities and advantages of the new printing technology for the production of books. The *ʾAgur*'s size—the first edition of the book is small and easy to carry around—compared to previous codes reflects Landau's intent to reach new audiences who had neither the resources nor time to study large tomes that necessarily had to remain in one place.[83] Manuscript materials and practices were laborious and expensive, and consequently few individuals amassed libraries of any sort. Such works were instead read and studied primarily in yeshivot. The small size of Landau's book meant that individuals without requisite time to study Jewish law could read this text outside of such contexts, in fact whenever and wherever

80. *Sefer ʾagur*, f. 181v.

81. See Bloch, *Hebrew Printing in Naples*, 9–10.

82. Such standardization and ease of access was later met with opposition. See Reiner, "Ashkenazi Elite."

83. As mentioned previously, the *ʾAgur* was printed in quarto form. Most early printed editions of the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Tur* were printed in folio form.

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they pleased. Moreover, the *ʾAgur* contains a detailed table of contents, a remarkable (for the time) feature that in today's vernacular made the *ʾAgur* user-friendly. One did not need to read the book intensively from cover to cover. Rather, it could be used as Landau intended, as a ready reference source to be consulted to answer specific questions as they arose or read in part and out of order.[84] It was a tool for those without the time or knowledge to devote themselves entirely to rabbinic study, not a treatise accessible only to the scholarly elite.[85]

Additionally, the first edition of the *ʾAgur* was printed together with Landau's *Sefer ḥazon*, a small stand-alone text of mystical legal conundrums.[86] These riddles were intended for entertainment, so the inclusion of this text gave the *ʾAgur* as initially published a dual purpose: to be read for study and pleasure. Landau also cited kabbalistic works, specifically the Zohar, at points in the *ʾAgur*, which further distinguishes his work from his predecessors' codes and speaks to its adaptation to the heterogeneity of his cultural environment.[87] Finally, the errata list printed by Landau at the end of the *ʾAgur* additionally shows his preoccupation with perfection and fixity of texts.[88] As seen from his colophon to Gunzenhauser's book of Psalms, Landau well understood the work of printers and the importance of producing a text in its most precise form. And if the *ʾAgur* was to establish a standardized Halakhah, as the approbations suggest, the errata were of absolute importance to this project.

Reception and Legacy of the *ʾAgur*

The *ʾAgur* represents a first adaptation of halakhic literature to print production. Landau did not simply reformat an existing code, he wrote a new work that in both substance and design was created for the new cultural realities of print. The *ʾAgur* accommodated both scholarly and nonscholarly readers and aimed to appeal to a wider and more cosmopolitan Jewish audience. The approbations Landau solicited for his book speak to his desire to gain authoritative acceptance for this new type of halakhic text. By producing the *ʾAgur* on a printing press with movable type Landau's ambitions could be best realized. However, despite the *ʾAgur*'s importance in the history of the Jewish book, Landau's efforts were not sufficient to attain his goals.

84. For more on discontinuous reading in manuscript and print culture see Peter Stallybrass, "Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible," in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, ed. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 42–70; Paul Saenger, *Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

85. It is important to note here that the language of the text—Hebrew—meant that one needed at least some rabbinic education to access its contents. Only a vernacular book would have been accessible to the uneducated and the Jewish public at large.

86. The *ʾAgur* and *Sefer ḥazon* were only printed together in the first and second editions; later they were each published as separate books.

87. See for example *Sefer ʾagur*, f. 6v:

ואני המחבר מצאתי בספר הזוהר בפ פנחס מאמר דרשב"י דאין לברך על שניהם אלא ברכה אחת.

88. Though this was a standard feature of early printed books.

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There are two primary reasons Landau's work did not become the standard Jewish legal resource. First, the *ʾAgur* has certain shortcomings that prohibit its ready use as a stand-alone guide to the law. The scope and size of the work made comprehensive summary of every law difficult, if not impossible. As a result, Landau does not spell out all practical details required for observance of every law. In the laws of ritual slaughter, for example, Landau does not list the details and processes required for properly salting meat. He instead discusses issues that arose in the period after the *Tur* and cites sources not fully discussed in the *Tur*. The *ʾAgur* thus sometimes functions best not on its own but as a companion book to the *Tur*.[89] Second, Landau's work was superseded by a better-executed project of similar intent: Joseph Karo's *Shulḥan ʿarukh*, which is clear, concise, and systematic and thus more useful as a single practical guide to the law. Indeed, as such, the *Shulḥan ʿarukh* quickly established widespread authority. Though Karo's text appeared a century after the emergence of movable type, when the cultural realities of print had already been better established, and Karo aggressively sought to get his text printed, passed by the censors, and accepted by Jewish communities of various origins, his work was also, simply, a more useful halakhic compendium.[90]

Though the *ʾAgur* was never accepted as a universal code of Jewish law, it continued to be printed, so it must have still been read, even if only by a small audience. After its second printing in Rimini in 1526, the *ʾAgur* was printed for a third time in Venice in 1545. The text then made its way to eastern Europe and was printed in Offenbach in 1718, Zolkovo in 1798, Sudzilkow in 1834, and Piotrkow in 1884. It seems to have been printed in the twentieth century only in New York, in 1959, and in Jerusalem, in 1960.[91] Altogether, the print runs of the *ʾAgur* were very few, especially when contrasted with those of the *Shulḥan ʿarukh*. Within a century after its original printing, the *ʾAgur* was already considered a relatively insignificant text. Lists of the libraries of the Jews of Mantua in 1595 show that of the 430 families who owned at least one book, only 16 owned a copy of the *ʾAgur*, while 185 families owned a copy of the *Mishneh Torah*, and approximately 150 owned copies of the *Tur* and *Shulḥan ʿarukh*.[92] Today, the number of Jewish families and institutions that own copies of the *ʾAgur* is even smaller. It would be odd to find a major yeshiva today without multiple copies of the *Mishneh Torah*, *Tur*, and *Shulḥan ʿarukh*, while it would be surprising if a single copy of the *ʾAgur* graced the bookshelves of these same institutions. Many observant families today also own copies

89. I thank Ted Fram for this insight.

90. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "From Safed to Venice: The *Shulḥan ʿArukh* and the Censor," in *Tradition, Heterodoxy and Religious Culture: Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Chanita Goodblatt and Howard Kreisel (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006), 91–115.

91. A survey of bibliography of the Hebrew book and various library collections yielded these figures.

92. Shifrah Barukhson, *Sefarim ve-korim: Tarbut ha-keriʾah shel yehude Italiah be-shelhe ha-renesans* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), 129–32.

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of the three standard codes of Jewish law, but few individuals are even aware of the *ʾAgur* and its significance, much less possess a copy.

Nevertheless, the *ʾAgur* has not entirely faded into obscurity. Indeed, Landau's contributions survive in the manifold footnotes of the Jewish legal corpus; he is cited authoritatively in nearly all of his successors' major halakhic works. Karo himself cited Landau's *ʾAgur* approximately one hundred times in his commentary on the *Tur*, the *Beit Yosef*.[93] Moses Isserles also very frequently used the *ʾAgur* as an authoritative source of Ashkenazic Halakhah. And none of the major commentaries on the *Shulḥan ʿarukh* and Isserles's *Mapa—Taz*, *Shakh*, and *Magen ʾAvraham*—failed to mention the *ʾAgur* and cite it authoritatively. The *ʾAgur* thus earned recognition from its successors, though perhaps not in the fashion Landau had desired.

As the fifteenth century drew to a close, Landau published his *ʾAgur* with a view to the cultural shifts made possible and accelerated by the development of movable type. Meant to reach nonscholarly audiences, appeal to a variety of geographically specific traditions, and ultimately establish itself as a standard halakhic guidebook, the *ʾAgur* represents an early textual adaptation to the culture of mechanical print. Though the text was not ultimately established as the authority Landau imagined, it may still be said that the *ʾAgur* helped uncouple textual access from education. Individuals without requisite knowledge or time for tackling the entire Jewish legal corpus—or even just the codes—had a written source they could readily and easily consult, a text that was specifically directed to them, and that was organized and produced so they could make use of it. As such, the *ʾAgur* was the first halakhic text truly of the printed age.

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93. Isadore Twersky, "*Shulhan Arukh*: Enduring Code of Jewish Law," in *The Jewish Expression*, ed. Judah Goldin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 322–43. Twersky notes that Karo treated the *ʾAgur* pejoratively (323). I am not entirely convinced this is the case, but even if it is, it is still significant that Karo cited Landau with such frequency.

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