

Edward Fram. *My Dear Daughter: Rabbi Benjamin Slonik and the Education of Jewish Women in Sixteenth-Century Poland*. Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, no. 33. Transl. by Edward Fram and Agnes Romer Segal. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2007. xx, 337 pp. Notes. Tables. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. \$39.95, cloth.

This important book, which contains a bilingual translation and transcription of the 1585 edition of a Yiddish handbook educating Jewish women (and men) in the laws of the menstruant (*niddah*), belongs to the fields of early modern Poland, women's and gender history, Yiddish language, the history of the book and printing, sexuality, and Jewish law. Deserving of a broad audience, it is nonetheless a highly specialized study of the prescriptions for early modern Polish Jewish marital life and sex.

In 1577, Rabbi Benjamin Slonik (ca. 1550–after 1620) wrote *Seder mitzvos ha-noshim* (The Order of Women's Commandments, Yiddish) to guide Jewish couples, particularly but not exclusively the women in them, in the intricacies of the proper observance of the three "women's commandments," i.e. the distinctive religious obligations incumbent upon Jewish women: the "taking" of *hallah*—the required burning of a small portion of the bread consumed on the Sabbath—the kindling of lights for the Sabbath and Jewish festivals, and, occupying the majority of Slonik's book and concern, the proper observance of the laws of *niddah*. Although Slonik was not the first rabbinic figure to write a how-to manual of these laws, his book, capitalizing on the revolution in printing and on the rise in Yiddish publishing, became the most popular of its type.

Fram's erudite discussion of Slonik's text treats the book's bibliographic context, its rootedness in the broad world of Ashkenazic (medieval Franco-German) Jewish piety, and its explicit reflection of the gendered norms of early modern Polish Jewish society. Fram's interest in Slonik advances the concerns of his first book, *Ideals Face Reality: Jewish Law and Life in Poland, 1550–1655* (1997), which treated the tension between rabbinic legal theory and the *realia* of early modern Polish Jewish life. Besides examining its preoccupation with female sexuality, Fram persuasively argues for the importance of *Seder mitzvos ha-noshim* as evidence of the penetration of the then-only-recently-published *Shulhan Arukh* (The Set Table), the sixteenth-century compendium of Jewish law that subsequently became authoritative throughout the Jewish world. Similarly influential due to the printing press, the *Shulhan Arukh* encoded the decisions of a Spanish Jewish codifier, Joseph Caro (1488–1575), and of the Cracow-born rabbi, Moses Isserles (1520–1572), in an intertextual dialogue. Slonik was a student of Isserles and his handbook incorporated his teacher's worldview (Tables 1 and 2 on pp. 133–138 compare passages in Slonik's text to those in the *Shulhan Arukh*).

Seder mitzvos ha-noshim highlights the tension between the educated male rabbinic elite, who were learned in Hebrew, and the uneducated female Jewish public, which, if literate, was so only in the vernacular, Yiddish. Fram's discussion assumes—rightfully to my mind—the patriarchal structure of pre-modern Jewish culture and his book makes no apology for or defence of it. Chapter Three, titled "Glimpses into the Lives of the Main Audience (mainly through the eyes of men)," underscores that men constructed the expectations of early modern Polish Jewish women's behaviour. Jewish women were socially and religiously subordinate to their fathers, husbands, and brothers—as were Christian women—and their piety was ancillary to theirs. Slonik understood Jewish women's religious obligations as parallels to Eve's sins and exhorted his audience to fulfill them on the pain of death. His views reflected pre-Talmudic traditions that had been known to a select few (p. 164), and Fram could have explored how Slonik appropriated and reworked those particular teachings. Slonik's text disseminated the conception of female

empowered powerlessness (my term). Responsible for the spiritual well-being of their husbands and children, Jewish women were nonetheless powerless because their social status and religious behaviour were determined by male religious and cultural expectations. Fram's work implicitly challenges recent scholarship on *tkhines*, the private Yiddish supplicatory prayers for women that appeared contemporaneously with Slonik's book, which has emphasized female empowerment.

My Dear Daughter raises tantalizing questions about early modern Polish society that Fram's concern with the history of Jewish law does not address, such as whether or not there was similar concern with female sexuality among Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox in the Commonwealth. While Yiddish literacy was rare among non-Jews, one cannot but wonder if there were any ritual parallels among Christians, such as those Elisheva Baumgarten illuminated in *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (2004).

HUC Press's transliteration style is a bit cumbersome, rendering *tkhines* as *thinus* and the title of Slonik's book according to its Hebrew not its Yiddish pronunciation. But by allowing Fram not only to publish his study of *Seder mitzvos ha-noshim* but also to include a full English translation, the press has made this significant work available to a wide scholarly audience, taking Slonik's goals of popularizing the intimate expectations of early modern Polish Jewish society one step further.

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Wendy Z. Goldman. *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin: The Social Dynamics of Terror*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 274 pp. Notes. Index. Photographs. \$80.00, cloth. \$22.99, paper.

The mass terror of the 1930s remains one of the most controversial periods of Soviet history. Wendy Goldman's new book, *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin*, unabashedly contributes a new perspective to the on-going debate from a provocative perspective. It is hard to imagine two more seemingly incongruous attributes of the late 1930s Soviet Union than terror and democracy.

The author's institutional focus fosters fresh insights into the dynamic of the terror. By focusing on the All-Union Central Council of Unions (TsSPS) that encompassed more than 22 million members, the study meticulously describes the interaction between the union and party power brokers and the rank-and-file response. Showing that the "slogans of terror were intimately intertwined with those of democracy" Goldman's thesis is that "repression was a mass phenomenon, not only in the number of victims it claimed, but also in the number of perpetrators it spawned" (pp. 7–8). While other historians have asserted mass participation in the terror, Goldman actually proves it. The strength of this study is the detailed description and analysis of the process of terror. Goldman describes the "geometric progression" of events as the terror gained momentum. Those arrested "served as a hub with multiple spokes to a wheel of contacts" who were then subsequently investigated and often arrested (p. 217).

Rather than a voluntary movement from below, Goldman shows that coercion from above was crucial to this mass participation. This was an orchestrated campaign, as "party leaders hectored the party to hunt more actively for enemies in the ranks." Passivity was hardly an option in this "culture of fear, denunciation, and arrest" because "a doubt not relayed to the proper authorities would itself become evidence of terrorism" (p. 123). While