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Abstract: Glikl bas Judah Leib, known since the late nineteenth century as Glückel of Hameln, has long been lauded as a unique voice in Ashkenazi history. Glikl is the only Jewish woman—and one of just a handful of early modern Jews—who has left us a book-length, autobiographical work. Her written work is unique in that respect, and in the quality of its narrative style. At the same time, characterizing Glikl as an “extraordinary” woman distorts the historical record. Many women in Glikl’s circles—the upper, though not highest, economic and social strata of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century German Jewry—read, wrote, conducted business, and raised families. While no single work by another woman compares in terms of its size and scope, this article demonstrates that various elements of both the form and content of Glikl’s writing can be found in the work of her contemporaries. A surviving will left by Rivkah Sinzheim of Mannheim, Germany, provides points of comparison to Glikl’s memoirs in its sense of mortality and in addressing moral instructions to the author’s children. Beila bas Perlhefter wrote an introduction to a book composed by her husband, at her urging, in memory of seven of their children, that narrates a biblical tale likewise cited by Glikl. The two women use the story in similar ways in drawing out its moral message, but their stylistic choices vary greatly. The comparison highlights both a shared cultural vocabulary and Glikl’s unique artistry. Reading Glikl alongside these contemporaries thus complicates and deepens our understanding of gender roles in early modern Ashkenaz, and of this extraordinary woman.

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It was written of a certain Jewish woman in seventeenth-century Germany that she:

was a pious, extremely lively woman, very knowledgeable in business matters. Indeed, she ran the entire household, traveling regularly to the fair in [Kiel] with merchandise, that is, she did not take much merchandise with her—people made do with little in those days. She was a good speaker, and all who saw her admired her. The ladies of the [Holstein] nobility favored her greatly.¹

Of those familiar with early Yiddish, or the history of Jews in early modern Europe, many might suppose this woman must be Glikl bas Judah Leib, known since the late nineteenth century as Glückel of Hameln (1645-1724).² One reviewer of Sara Friedman's recent English translation of Glikl's work, based on Chava Turniansky's majestic edition of the classic of self-writing, moral instruction, bequest and memorial even wrote: "Let us now praise famous Jewish women: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, and . . . *Glikl!*"³ The pious wife knowledgeable in business matters described above, however, is not Glikl. She is Esther (d. 1683), wife of Yehudah Leib Hildesheim (d. 1663), and Glikl is the narrator.⁴ In other words, as Turniansky has already pointed out, Glikl knew many women like herself: women involved in business, managing complex financial matters, writing documents and engaging in negotiations, raising children and managing extensive households.⁵ On the one hand, she has left us one of the few surviving book-length works of self-writing by any Jew—male or female—in the medieval or early modern period.⁶ Her writing is thus

¹ Glikl, *Glikl: Memoirs 1691-1719*, ed. Chava Turniansky, trans. Sarah P. Friedman (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2019), 74. For the original Yiddish text with facing Hebrew translation: *Glikl: zikhronot, 1691-1719*, trans. and ed. Chava Turniansky (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar and Merkaz Dinur, 2006), 62, 64.

² The definitive edition is Chava Turniansky's critical edition and Hebrew translation (above), and the English translation by Sarah P. Friedman, based on that edition. More on the publication history below.

³ Robert D. King, "The Groundbreaking Memoirs of Glikl of Hamel," *Mosaic* (February 4, 2020). <https://mosaicmagazine.com/observation/arts-culture/2020/02/the-groundbreaking-memoirs-of-glikl-of-hamel/>.

⁴ Esther is mentioned by Eduard Duckesz, *Zur Geschichte und Genealogie der ersten Familien der hochdeutschen Israeliten-Geminden in Hamburg-Altona* (Hamburg: M. Lessmann, 1915), 45-46. https://www.nli.org.il/en/books/NNL_ALEPH990022427960205171/NLI.

⁵ Chava Turniansky, "Glikl Has a Story for Everything: Translator and Expert Prof. Chava Turniansky Reflects," Yiddish Book Center's Wexler Oral History Project, <https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/oral-histories/excerpts/woh-ex-0004267/glikl-has-story-everything-translator-and-expert-prof-chava-turniansky-reflects> (Yiddish with English subtitles), minute 1:22; Chava Turniansky, "The Image of the Woman in the Memoirs of Glikl Hamel," in *Eros, Eirusin, Ve-Isurin*, ed. I. Gafni and I. Bartal (Jerusalem, 1998), 189 [in Hebrew]. Also: Moshe Rosman, "The Early Modern European 'Jewish Woman,'" *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 33-34 (2008): 407-16.

⁶ On Jewish self-writing, see, e.g.: Rachel L. Greenblatt, *To Tell Their Children: Jewish Communal Memory in Early Modern Prague* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 83-116; Marcus Moseley, *Being for Myself Alone: Origins of Jewish Autobiography* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Jeffrey H. Chajes, "Accounting for the Self: Preliminary Generic-Historical Reflections on Early Modern Jewish Egodocuments," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 1 (2005): 1-15; Mark R. Cohen, ed., *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Debra Kaplan, "The Self in Social Context: Asher Ha-Levi of Reichshofen's *Sefer Zikhronot*," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97, no. 2

sui generis. Skillfully crafted, it draws a long narrative arc and weaves stories artfully. On the other hand, Glikl's manuscript did not self-generate *ex nihilo*. Rather, her prose emerges as extraordinary in a context in which many women of her socio-economic class also wrote texts, with a variety of audiences in mind.⁷ In the pages that follow, I compare Glikl's writing to much shorter texts by two female contemporaries, in search of shared literary territory on the one hand and the unique creative impulse on the other. This double-sided approach constitutes an attempt to cast aside contemporary lenses in order to more fully and accurately assess the variety of women's roles in early modern Ashkenaz. In broad strokes, both women considered here shared Glikl's favorable socioeconomic status and central European location. Rivkah bas Avraham, wife of Chaim Sinzheim, left an ethical will for her children.⁸ Beila bas Yaakov Perlhefter, wife of Baer Eibeschutz (known from the time of his marriage as Baer Perlhefter), wrote an introduction to a book her husband wrote at—by her own account—her urging, framed as a memorial to seven children of theirs who had passed away.⁹ A reading of Glikl alongside Rivkah focuses on matters of form. It reveals, through the use of a specific genre, the participation of Ashkenazi women in a culture concerned with planning family trajectories beyond a single generation, that they should remember her, their foremother, as they go forward and prosper.¹⁰ Reading Glikl alongside Beila, we focus instead on shared content. These women, like the men in their communities, used traditional Jewish text to frame the familial stories they told and to draw values from them and about them. At the same time, turning our attention back to matters of form, the comparison of Glikl and Beila highlights at least part of what is, indeed, unique about Glikl.

First, though, let us introduce Glikl, and set the stage with regard to writing by early modern Ashkenazi women, in which considerations of language, genre, and the history of book publication all play a role. Glikl reports that she began composing it

(2007): 210–36; Alexander Marx, "A Seventeenth-Century Autobiography: A Picture of Jewish Life in Bohemia and Moravia. From a Manuscript in the Jewish Theological Seminary," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 8, no. 3 (January 1918): 269–304.

⁷ For sources, see: Rachel Elijor, "Chapter 29: Women Writers in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries in Yiddish-Speaking Ashkenazi Society," in *The Unknown History of Jewish Women Through the Ages: On Learning and Illiteracy: On Slavery and Liberty*, trans. Shmuel Sermoneta-Gertal (Berlin and Jerusalem: de Gruyter and Magnes Press, 2023), 657–66, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111043913>.

⁸ Joseph Bloch, "Le testament d'une femme juive au commencement du XVIIIe siècle," *Revue des études juives* 90 (April-June 1931): 146–160, www.persee.fr/doc/rjuiv_0484-8616_1931_num_90_180_5704. A partial English translation was published as "Rebecca Halfon: Testament (Manheim)," in *The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization: Volume Five, The Early Modern Era, 1500–1750*, ed. Yosef Kaplan (New Haven and Lucern: Yale University Press and the Posen Foundation, 2023), 160–61.

⁹ Beer Perlhefter and Bella Perlhefter, *Be'er Sheva: An Edition of a Seventeenth Century Yiddish Encyclopedia*, ed. Nathanael Riemer, trans. Sigrid Senkbeil (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011); Nathanael Riemer, *Zwischen Tradition und Häresie: "Beer Sheva" - eine Enzyklopädie des jüdischen Wissens der Frühen Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); Elisheva Carlebach, "Bella Perlhefter," *Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women* June 23, 202, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/perlhefter-bella>; Nathanael Riemer, "Zwischen christlichen Hebraisten und Sabbatianern – der Lebensweg von R. Beer und Bila Perlhefter," *Aschkenas* 14, no. 1 (2004): 163–201.

¹⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis, "Ghosts, Kin, and Progeny: Some Features of Family Life in Early Modern France," *Daedalus* 106, no. 2 (1977): 87–114.

during sleepless nights of grief and despair following the death of her husband of 30 years, Chaim:

My dear children, I began writing this, with God's help, after the death of your pious father, since it afforded me some pleasure when the melancholy thoughts were upon me. I passed many sleepless nights in the throes of severe anxiety, for we were like sheep without a shepherd—as our faithful shepherd was no more, and I feared I would give way to melancholy thoughts, God forbid. So I would often rise in the night to spend the sleepless hours in this fashion.¹¹

Glikl, at that time, was in her mid-forties. She records genealogies of Chaim's family and her own, and reports on the day-to-day workings of the business they built together, developing a small trade in gems into an international financial network. She weaves in stories, tales, and lessons for her children. On occasion, she tells of contemporary events involving people she knew, but which she could not possibly have witnessed personally.¹² Of fourteen children born to the couple, twelve survived to adulthood. At the time of Chaim's death, the eldest four were married; the youngest but toddlers. The work was copied by children and grandchildren and kept in manuscript by Glikl's descendants. A surviving manuscript features a decorative title page. In 1896, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholar David Kaufmann published an edition of the work in its original old Yiddish.¹³ Feminist activist Bertha Pappenheim, a distant relative of Glikl, translated it into modern German in 1910.¹⁴ Subsequent translations reworked the text to construct a linear autobiographical arc, losing, in the process, much of Glikl's own distinct voice.¹⁵ Chava Turniansky's 2006 critical edition and Hebrew translation restored the text to its original fullness and

¹¹ Glikl, trans. Friedman, 43; in Yiddish, *Glikl*, ed. Turniansky, 10, 12.

¹² For a discussion of Glikl's use of tales interwoven in her text, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 5–62. For her use of language as revealing the types of sources on which various passages relied, Turniansky, "Glikl Has a Story for Everything: Translator and Expert Prof. Chava Turniansky Reflects," Yiddish Book Center's Wexler Oral History Project, <https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/oral-histories/excerpts/woh-ex-0004267/glikl-has-story-everything-translator-and-expert-prof-chava-turniansky-reflects> (Yiddish with English subtitles); and, for these and many related issues, see Chava Turniansky, "Introduction" in *Glikl*, trans. Friedman, 1–38. A more detailed introduction appears in the Hebrew version, *Glikl: zikhronot, 1691-1719*, trans. and ed. Turniansky, numbered in Hebrew letters prior to the beginning of Arabic page numbering.

¹³ David Kaufmann, ed., *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln, 1645-1719* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kaufmann, 1896), also referred to by the title *Zikhroynes*. For the full transmission and translation history, see Turniansky, "Introduction," in *Glikl*, trans. Friedman, 32–36, and a more detailed exposition in the Hebrew-Yiddish edition, *Glikl*, ed. Turniansky, 11–77.

¹⁴ Bertha Pappenheim, *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln, geboren in Hamburg 1645, gestorben in Metz 19. September 1724* (Vienna: Verlag von Stefan Meyer und Wilhelm Pappenheim, 1910). See Matthew Johnson, "Off-Translation: Bertha Pappenheim's Yiddish-German," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 68, no. 1 (2023): 52–71.

¹⁵ Matthew Johnson has explored what can be gained by examining these translations in their own historical contexts: "Glikl's Circulation. Editing, Translating, and Value," in *Der Wert der literarischen Zirkulation = The Value of Literary Circulation*, eds. Michael Gamper, Jutta Müller-Tamm, David Wachter, and Jasmin Wrobel (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, 2023), 291–309.

was the basis for the most recent English translation, by Sarah Friedman, which is now the definitive English edition.¹⁶

Women, Language, and Literacy in Early Modern Ashkenaz

As Glikl's work is frequently called on to provide evidence in a wide variety of historical topics related to the Jews of early modern central Europe, historians have questioned the validity of relying on such a unique, unrepresentative source as a book-length manuscript written by an extraordinary woman, even as they confess plainly to doing the same themselves.¹⁷ Looking more closely at the ground from which Glikl's writing grew can preserve her unique artistry while removing the unhelpful categorization of her as an "extraordinary woman." As Turniansky writes, "It is reasonable to assume that other women of her station had a similar education and that among them were others who, like Glikl, put ink to paper to tell the story—or episodes—of their life; yet only Glikl's work has reached us."¹⁸ Contemporary scholars' equivocations, I would argue, stem in part from the understandable tendency, often implicit, to view Glikl's text, retrospectively, as a predecessor of a modern literary form, autobiography, which it does not quite match.¹⁹ Turning the tables to attempt to view it, instead, as building on earlier genres of writing, as a qualitatively extensive expansion of types of writing in which Jewish women were already engaged, will help us to place Glikl more firmly in her concrete historical context, and thus allow her to teach more about Jewish women of her time and place than she has sometimes been allowed to do.

Moreover, as long as we consider Glikl an "extraordinary" woman, we do not need to contend with the ways in which her writing upsets widely held conventional wisdom regarding male and female roles in early modern Ashkenazi Jewry—notions that may have more to do with central European norms in the nineteenth century than in the seventeenth.²⁰ As Marion Kaplan, among others, has detailed, the embourgeoisement of the developing German Jewish middle class occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, principally in the home. In the course

¹⁶ Glikl, trans. Friedman.

¹⁷ E.g., Robert Liberles, "She Sees that her Merchandise is Good, and Her Lamp is Not Extinguished at Nighttime": Glikl's Memoir as Historical Source," *Nashim* 7 (2004): 11-27.

¹⁸ Glikl, trans. Friedman, 22.

¹⁹ Cf. Natalie Zemon Davis, "Fame and Secrecy: Leon Modena's *Life* as an Early Modern Autobiography," in *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah*, trans. and ed. Mark R. Cohen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 50-70.

²⁰ Scholarly notation of the work's "singular position" have been widespread, as in this phrase from Linda Ellen Feldman, "Converging Difference: Reflections on Marginalism, Postmodernism and the 'Memoirs' of Glückel von Hameln," *Daphnis: Zeitschrift für Mittlere Deutsche Literatur* 22, no. 4 (1993): 669-70. On early modern Ashkenazi women: Debra Kaplan and Elisheva Carlebach, "Jewish Women in Early Modern Central Europe, 1500-1800," in *Jewish Women's History from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Rebecca Lynn Winer and Federica Francesconi (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2021), 169-92; Moshe Rosman, "Jewish Women in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: From Facilitation to Participation," in *Jewish Women's History*, ed. Winer and Francesconi, 193-215; Moshe Rosman, "Lehiyot isha be-Folin-Lita be-reshit ha-et ha-hadasha," in *Kiyyum ve-shever: Yehudei Polin le-dorotehem*, vol. 2, ed. Israel Bartal and Israel Gutman (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1987), 415-31; Yemima Chovav, 'Alamot Ahevukha: Haya Ha-Dat V'eha-Ruah Shel Nashim Ba-Hevrah Ha-Ashkenazit Be-Reshit Ha-'et Ha-Hadashah (Yerushalayim: Merkaz Dinur and Carmel, 2009).

of this process, domestic space was severed from the marketplace.²¹ A similar division emerged in the post-World War II American suburbs. In American Jewish popular culture, characters such as the mother in *The Jazz Singer* and Golde in *Fiddler on the Roof* likewise portray women whose sole functions are domestic in a manner that appears to exclude income-producing dimensions, despite their different, eastern European backgrounds. Such was the case even as their authors and audiences were well aware of both the ideal of a man as devoted to study and a woman as gaining merit through her support of her husband and sons in that endeavor and the economic realities of working women in the eastern European Pale of Settlement. In other words, the nineteenth-century bourgeois image of Jewish gender roles holds a certain influence.

Glikl's society, in contrast, was characterized by a nearly complete overlap of these two spheres, the "domestic" and the "marketplace": spatially, economically, and functionally. The family's home served as the headquarters of their business, with little separation between the physical spaces of childrearing, cooking, gem-trading, and contract-writing. In this setting, a young man hired "to look after the children" later became a business partner. Glikl implies, though she does not clearly state, that while caring for the children, he began to learn the family's business practices.²² Women, including Glikl prior to widowhood, were more likely to stay home while men traveled to the fairs where many larger sales and financial transactions took place, but commercial affairs continued directly into the home. Nor does the marriage of Glikl and Chaim match the religious ideal of full-time Torah study.²³ Chaim's main occupation was to participate, with Glikl, in providing economically for their family. Just one of their sons was sent to yeshiva to learn full-time, and that ended disastrously.

A different distinction between female and male realms characterized Glikl's daily life, a linguistic distinction. Like most Jewish societies throughout history this population was diglossic, meaning that it operated simultaneously in two internal languages, using each for its distinct realm. In the male space of public ritual, and in religious and intellectual writing, the sacred *loshn koydesh* (Hebrew with Aramaic elements characteristic of the Talmud and rabbinic writings that followed) was employed. Glikl's society was also bilingual, using German for business and civic purposes outside the Jewish community. Much scholarship on early Yiddish literature presumes the "female" nature of its primary readership. And here is the heart of the notion that early Yiddish literature was primarily for women, and for men, who like women, were insufficiently educated for proper Torah Study.

Yet, the very boundary lines between men's ritual *loshn koydesh* and women's secular, Yiddish spaces in Glikl's time had their own character as boundary lines. I would suggest that it is possible that here too, our lenses are sometimes distorted by the firm lines, solid as the walls of an upper middle class home, that characterized the divisions between realms; the female home on the one hand and male workplace

²¹ Marion A. Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, e.g., 4; Paula E. Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1995).

²² *Glikl*, trans. Friedman, 97: "Our first servant was Avraham Kantor of Hildesheim; at first we employed him to look after the children. A few years later he left us to engage in some commerce on his own" (emphasis added). Later, after he had married, "We gave him an advance and sent him to Copenhagen."

²³ Rosman, "The Early Modern."

on the other, in the formative nineteenth-century and early twentieth centuries. There, men did not occupy themselves with children or household tasks; the married women who lived in those homes did not enter their husbands' offices or places of business. The separation of realms in diglossic early modern Ashkenaz (defined here as Yiddish-speaking realms from approximately the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries) had its own, asymmetrical character. All Ashkenazi Jews—women and men, young and old, learned and ignorant, wealthy and poor—lived their daily lives, including oral discussion of the *loshn koydesh* texts at the center of Torah study, in Yiddish (*taytsh* or *leshon ashkenaz*). While women were excluded from or pushed to the edges of ritual Hebrew spaces—such as the main sanctuary of the synagogue and the *yeshiva* or *beis midrash*—their physical proximity to ritual spaces, where *loshn koydesh* prevailed, sometimes allowed them limited access. When family members were rabbis who taught, women sometimes heard lessons. Men, for their part, lived their lives in and moved more freely throughout the Yiddish-speaking areas, excluded only in specific instances such as childbirth, the women's section of the synagogue, and the mikveh.²⁴ While learned men's Hebrew writing quoted only Hebrew sources, there is no more reason to think they never read the Yiddish literature available to them than there is to think that an Oxford don today never watches a Hollywood feature film. Thus, Shmuel Charney, who wrote an early, seminal article on women as readers of early Yiddish—though he recognized that women were the primary reading audience of this literature and built most of the work on that foundation—opened by stating that the accepted notion that Yiddish literature was originally a literature intended exclusively for women and unlearned men contained “a *shtikel guzme*” (a bit of an exaggeration).²⁵

Gender & Genre, Print & Manuscript

Glikl, then, as opposed to the norms and images born in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, operated in a world where the domestic was commercial and the commercial domestic, where the language of literature outside of the learned-élite realm was the vernacular old Yiddish, where men and women read in this language, and where women, with increasing frequency, wrote in it as well. In none of these regards was she extraordinary. That distinction belongs instead to her talent in writing, the quality and quantity of the bequest she has left us. Turniansky points out that Glikl herself did not know exactly what to call her work, written primarily for her own descendants. She did not name her work or assign it a genre—calling it only “it,” “this,” or similar terms; she highlighted only what it was not, a “book of morals” (*sefer mussar*).²⁶

²⁴ For example, while physically separated from men in the synagogue, they attended; Moshe Rosman has suggested their inclusion in the synagogue space increased in the early modern period vis-à-vis the medieval: Moshe Rosman, “Jewish Women in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,” 202-3.

²⁵ Shmuel Niger, “Di Yidishe literatur un di lezerin,” in *Bleter geshikhte fun der Yidisher literatur* (New York: Congress for Jewish Culture, 1959), 37. Originally appeared in the journal *Der pinkes*, 1913, reprinted Vilne, 1919. דער אָנגענומענער מיינונג, אז די ליטעראטור און יידיש איז אָנהייב געווען אַ ליטעראטור נאר פֿאַר ווייבער און עס האַרצים, שטעקט אַ שטיקל גוזמאָ ווייבער און עס האַרצים, שטעקט אַ שטיקל גוזמאָ. Emphasis in the original. Niger was the pen name of Shmuel Charney. Scholarship on this point has developed substantially since Charney's time, highlighting, among other things, the implied lack of masculinity inherent in a man who reads these Yiddish works, see esp. Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*.

²⁶ Turniansky, “Introduction,” in *Glikl*, trans. Friedman, 2.

This, as well as what I have already written and what I am about to write, comes from a deeply grieving heart following the death of my dearest husband, of blessed memory, who was our faithful shepherd; surely God, blessed be He, took him to Him because of our sins, for *because of evil the righteous was taken away*. I will not dwell on this at length here, since I intend, God willing, to leave all this for you in seven little books (*bikhler*), if God grants me life.²⁷

“And, indeed,” Turniansky concludes on this basis, “what Glikl was writing was so utterly different from anything published until then in Yiddish or Hebrew that it is not at all surprising she did not have a name for it.”²⁸ Some scholars have likewise expressed consternation regarding this difficulty of pinpointing the genre of Glikl’s writing.²⁹ This difficulty in categorizing the work, the lack of a name for its genre, tells us much about our difficulty in locating early modern Ashkenazi women’s writing. Very little of it fits the genres with which we are familiar, which are based on recognized genres of Jewish men’s writing of the time, composed in Hebrew for religious use: biblical and Talmudic commentary, legal codes and responsa literature, homiletics, ethical literature, some liturgical works meant for local or regional use. Nor does it fit the genres prevalent in old Yiddish: epic and historical poetry, stories, translations of romance and other belles-lettres. These genres, though, are built from corpses of writing by men.

Thus, Glikl highlighted, as Turniansky points out, only what the book was not, a “book of morals” (*sefer mussar*).³⁰ This particular denial, I would suggest, is not a mark of false humility, but rather a factually accurate statement: *sefer mussar* did not mean a book including moral advice; it referred to a specific genre, whose outlines Glikl’s work does not fit overall, though in places she builds on much of the substance of *sifrei mussar* (plural, also sometimes called *mussar bikher*). We know of one woman who did write a book belonging to this genre, Rivke bas Meyer Tiktiner (d. 1605), the first known female author of a Yiddish book. Her *Meynekes Rivke* is a *sefer mussar*, directed specifically at women, instructing them in proper conduct, particularly in regard to their relationships with husbands, parents, parents-in-law, children, servants, and guests.³¹ Women were widely advised to read *mussar* books; Glikl recommends several to her children. No others, however, are known to have been written by women. Tiktiner also wrote in a second nameable Yiddish genre, a liturgical poem, a *Simkhes-touye lid*, or song for Simchat Torah. Another festival song by a woman is known: Taube Pan wrote for Yom Kippur. These Yiddish poems are closely related to the only named genre in which several published compositions by women in early Yiddish are extant, namely that of the *tkhines*, prayers recited in Yiddish, whose best known female author is Sarah Leah bas Tovim, also known as Leah Horowitz.³² I have previously suggested that an anonymous

²⁷ Glikl, trans. Friedman, 59.

²⁸ Turniansky, “Introduction” in Glikl, trans. Friedman, 19. Turniansky, in her Hebrew introduction, highlights in particular a European genre known as “personal chronicle,” כב.

²⁹ For example, Chajes, “Accounting for the Self,” makes this point in regard to the Hebrew translation by A. Z. Rabinowitz.

³⁰ Glikl, trans. Freidman, 43; Glikl, ed. Turniansky, 12.

³¹ Frauke von Rohden, ed., *Meneket Rivkah: A Manual of Wisdom and Piety for Jewish Women* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008).

³² Yael Levin, ed., *Simhat Torah lid le-Rivkah Tikhtiner* (Jerusalem, 2005); Kathryn Hellerstein, *A Question of Tradition: Women Poets in Yiddish, 1586-1987* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press,

Yiddish song about a 1713 plague in Prague might have been written by a woman.³³ This too, as a form of elegy, is loosely related to the other printed liturgical works.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that a text had to be printed for Glikl to have been familiar with it. Well into the age of print, many texts continued to circulate in manuscript.³⁴ She wrote business documents and undoubtedly read them herself. Much early modern self-writing grew out of business ledgers, though we lack surviving examples from Jewish business families. She was well aware of ethical wills, as detailed below. Print had, though, played an important role in another sense: the spread of print and the market logic it dictated meant that books—which once belonged wholly to the realm of *loshn koydesh*—increasingly appeared in the vernacular Yiddish.³⁵ It is likely that in the context of this increasing body of published work for women, market forces encouraged them to see themselves as readers, and then also as writers. There were also women involved in print, and women widely known as learned.³⁶ An origin tale of Prague’s Jewish community “brought to press” by two women around the turn of the eighteenth century suggested that a woman might have far greater, life-saving practical intelligence than a man.³⁷ It also seems almost certain that the works known to have survived would be a distinct minority of those written. Women expressed their knowledge, and their tradition-inflected moral outlooks, in gifts of inscribed ceremonial objects, in lives lived and recorded by others, as on gravestones.

We turn, then, to two examples of women’s writings that share important characteristics with Glikl’s. As mentioned above, in the first case, the commonality lies in the realm of form: the ethical will. In the second case, Glikl and a female contemporary shared important content, based on a biblical source.³⁸ (They share more than that, but a full comparison will wait for another opportunity.) These examples simultaneously provide a glimpse into the ways in which Glikl was within the bounds of the “ordinary” woman of her time and place, and a glimpse into the way in which she was, indeed, extraordinary.

2014); Kathryn Hellerstein, “The Name in the Poem: Women Yiddish Poets,” *Shofar* 20, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 32-52; Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*; Moshe Rosman, “Leah Horowitz’s *Tkhine Imohos*: A Proto-Feminist Demand to Increase Jewish Women’s Religious Capital,” *Polin Studies in Polish Jewry* 33, no. 1 (2021): 17-50.

³³ Greenblatt, *To Tell Their Children*, 183-85; see also Chava Turniansky, “Yiddish Song as Historical Source Material,” in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, eds. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein (London: P. Halban, 1988), 189-98. On the plague: Joshua Teplitsky, “Heroes and Victims without Villains: Plague in Early Modern Prague,” *Jewish Social Studies* 26, no. 1 (2020): 67-76; Joshua Teplitsky, “Order in Crisis: Jewish Relief Workers during the Prague Plague of 1713,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 111, no. 3 (2021): 362-73.

³⁴ E.g., the classic work of Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) and for Jewish yeshiva students in early modern Europe: Elchanan Reiner, “A Biography of an Agent of Culture: Eleazar Altschul of Prague and His Literary Activity,” in *Schöpferische Momente des europäischen Judentums in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Michael Graetz (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 2000), 229-47.

³⁵ Greenblatt, *To Tell Their Children*, 168-83.

³⁶ Jennifer Breger, “The Role of Jewish Women in Hebrew Printing,” *Antiquarian Bookman* (March 29, 1993): 1320-1329.

³⁷ Greenblatt, *To Tell Their Children*, 137-39, 168-72.

³⁸ I would like to write a more complete comparison at another opportunity. See also: Nathanael Riemer, “Some Parallels of Stories in Glikl’s of Hameln *Zikhronyes*,” *PaRDeS: Zeitschrift der Vereinigung für Jüdische Studien* 14 (2008): 125-48.
<https://publishup.uni-potsdam.de/opus4-ubp/frontdoor/index/index/year/2008/docId/2094>.

Rivkah Sinzheim and Ethical Wills

One layer of Glikl's work fits that of an ethical will. Like a *mussar bukh*, an ethical will—often appearing as a part of the document that spells out disposition of assets—provides moral instruction to one's children.³⁹ Glikl's work supplies that, along with the bequest of a fount of knowledge of family history, implying, along the way, the ethical value of that history as well.⁴⁰ Much of her first book, the shortest, reads very much as an ethical will:

I ask this of you, dear children: have patience. God, blessed be He, has inflicted punishment upon you—accept it all with forbearance, and do not cease praying; perhaps He will have mercy. . . . My dear children, be good and honest; serve God our Lord with all your heart in good times as well as in bad, God forbid. . . . So what is there to be sorrowful for? Only for letting a day go by without observing the commandments, and certainly one should be sorrowful for committing transgressions, for we human beings were created for the sole purpose of serving God, observing his commandments, and fulfilling what is written in our holy Torah: "*For thereby you shall have life and long endure.*"⁴¹

Crucially, as Glikl knows other businesswomen, she also knows of other women's wills. She writes of a deceased acquaintance, related to herself through marriage:

It is well known what an important man this Rabbi Modl Dayan was, and his pious wife Pessele—surely there's been no one like her in the world since the matriarchs Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah. Truly no woman could hold a candle to her when it comes to piety and righteousness, especially as she was a woman of valor and ran the business. . . . They both passed away in Berlin, prosperous and well respected. It was astonishing to read her will; I will write nothing about it. Anyone wishing to read her will can still find it at her children's; surely they never threw it away.⁴²

Not only does Glikl know other women like herself, she knows other women like herself who have written documents—wills—for their children, wills they expect to be carefully preserved and available to people from outside the immediate family circle as well. In fact, Glikl herself has read this distant relative's will. We do not know whether Pessele's will included instructions for disposition of property; however, if it

³⁹ The classic collection of Jewish ethical wills, originally published in 1926, is Israel Abrahams, ed. *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, 2 volumes, expanded and with a new introduction by Lawrence Fine (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006); and see: Avriel Bar-Levav, "When I Was Alive': Jewish Ethical Wills as Egodocuments," in *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in Its Social Context Since the Middle Ages*, ed. Rudolf Dekker (Hilversum: Verloren Publishers, 2002), 45-59.

⁴⁰ Turniansky views the first of Glikl's seven books as closely related to the genre of ethical wills, and notes Glikl's own mention of the famous Horowitz family ethical will, *Yesh Nohalin*. Turniansky, "Introduction" in *Glikl*, trans. Friedman, 4-8. Glikl's work is included in the updated edition of Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, ed. Israel Abrahams (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2006). On medieval women's wills: *Jewish Women's Wills: A Collaborative Premodern Collection*, <https://jewishwomenswills.omeka.net/>.

⁴¹ *Glikl*, trans. Friedman, 50-51; *Glikl*, ed. Turniansky, 28, 30.

⁴² *Glikl*, trans. Friedman, 176-77; *Glikl*, ed. Turniansky, 313, 315.

did, it clearly included much more than that. Glikl likewise does not tell her reader whether the contents of the will or its literary style make it worthy of seeking out; one could suppose it might well have displayed both. Nor does she relate with certainty the language of Pessele's will, though I would take the absence of noting it as an indication it was likely a mostly Yiddish text, with possible smatterings of Hebrew quotations, as is the case with regard to Glikl's own writing. The little we do know based on this passage, however, provides an overlooked window into one aspect of how Glikl might well have viewed her own manuscript. Though she wrote primarily for her children, whom she expected—and perhaps entreatingly instructed through this passage—to preserve it carefully, Glikl also expected that her seven “little books” could be viewable by a wider audience, by friends and relations who might hear of it by word of mouth. The biting double-sidedness of the last few lines cries out. Is Glikl confident Pessele's children have kept her will, or fearful lest they have not? Does Glikl here issue a mildly passive-aggressive plea to her own children to preserve carefully these seven books? Whatever the case, this insight into Glikl's own view of her potential reading audience is significant. Among Christians in early modern Europe as well, familial manuscript writings were sometimes read by others, outside the immediate family circle, who heard of them and requested access.⁴³

The passage about Pessele, however, provides no information regarding what specifically her will might actually have contained, nor what literary form it might have taken. Indulging some degree of conjecture, we can gather more information about how a well-to-do Jewish woman's will could have looked based on a similar document. This is the will of a contemporary of Glikl, Rivkah bas Avraham Halfon, wife of Chaim Sintzheim, of Mannheim, Germany, published in the original Yiddish and in partial French translation in the *Revue des études juives* in 1931.⁴⁴ Rivkah and her family belonged to the rabbinic and economic elite of their time. They were active throughout central Europe including Metz, Worms, and Vienna. Her son Yitzhak—who copied her will from an earlier manuscript and attested to reciting it annually on the date of his mother's death, as per her instructions within the document—was the father of Joseph David Sinzheim, rabbi of Strasbourg and a key participant in Napoleon's Assembly of Notables and Grand Sanhedrin.⁴⁵ Her daughter Blümle donated a silver-embroidered Torah mantle.⁴⁶

Like Glikl's work, the surviving text of Rivkah's will, transcribed by her son, was framed with a decorative title page.⁴⁷

⁴³ Davis, “Ghosts, Kin, and Progeny”; Davis, “Fame and Secrecy: Leon Modena's Life as an Early Modern Autobiography,” *History and Theory* 27, no. 4 (December 1988): 103.

⁴⁴ Bloch, “Le testament.” I am not aware of scholarship on Rivkah's ancestry or background prior to her marriage.

⁴⁵ E.g. Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews, and the Sanhedrin* (London; Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); Moshe Catane and Yehoshua Horowitz, “Sinzheim, Joseph David ben Isaac” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 18 (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 641-642. For additional examples of instructions regarding the annual—or even weekly—rereading of the ethical will by descendants, see Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, and for the weekly practice, page 228.

⁴⁶ Vivian B. Mann and Richard I. Cohen, eds. *From the Court Jews to the Rothschilds: Art, Patronage, and Power 1600-1800* (New York, Munich: Prestel, 1996), 234 (cat. no. 247) and 29 (illustration). Available online at the Jewish Museum, <https://thejewishmuseum.org/collection/19139-torah-mantle>.

⁴⁷ Rebecca Halfon, Testament (Mannheim, 1713). From the collections of Alliance Israelite Universelle (Paris), Ms. 423. “Ktiv” Project, The National Library of Israel. [https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001502900205171/NLI#\\$FL61163823](https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001502900205171/NLI#$FL61163823).



Figure 1: Rebecca Halfon, Testament (Manheim, 1713). From the collections of Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU, Paris), Ms. 423. "Ktiv" Project, The National Library of Israel. [https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001502900205171/NLI#\\$FL61163824](https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001502900205171/NLI#$FL61163824).

The care taken with the design of the page suggests that the document is meant to be preserved as a precious object in the family, as the basis of the annual familial memorial liturgy whose rituals it prescribes. Yitzhak refers to his father Chaim as deceased, while the text of the will refers to him as living. Thus, the extant copy transcribed by Chaim is not the original, and, most likely, several different family members each kept their own copies. Following an introduction attesting to Rivkah's faith in the one God, she pleads, lest her husband not wish to comply with her wishes, that she supported his business interests and, in contrast to other women, never burdened him with the purchase of expensive clothing. She includes instructions for distributing charity upon her death, and regarding her burial and memorial practices to be instituted in her memory, alongside moral instructions for her husband and children. She opens with remarks on the precariousness of human life whose tone echoes that of Glikl's parables and stories: a person is like fish, who never knows when they might be caught in a net; therefore, one prepares for death, lest they be caught unawares:

Listen, that your souls may live, for we humans are like fish in the sea, who are caught in a [net] and no one is secure in any moment when God will decree on us that it will be his end.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ AIU, Ms. 423. "Ktiv" Project, National Library of Israel.

The lesson is emphasized through the shape in which the text is copied, that of an hourglass, symbolizing the limited time of human life:⁴⁹

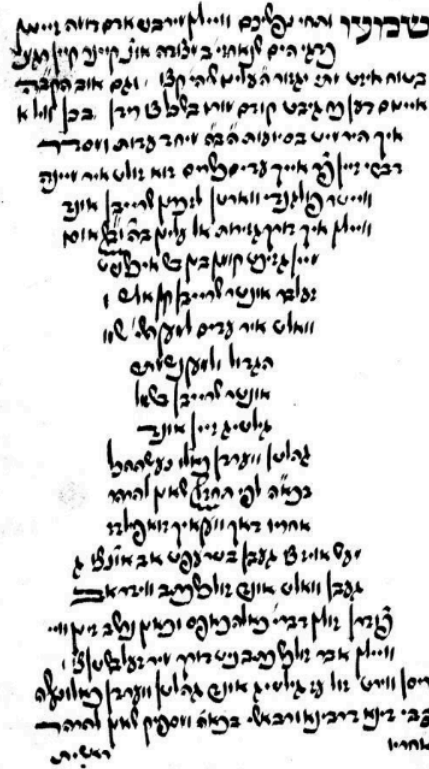


Figure 2: Rebecca Halfon, Testament (Manheim, 1713). From the collections of Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU, Paris), Ms. 423. "Ktiv" Project, The National Library of Israel. [https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001502900205171/NLI#\\$FL61163825](https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001502900205171/NLI#$FL61163825).

Glikl likewise wrote of the precariousness of human life in her first book:

For example, a passenger ship is sailing at sea. One of the passengers goes to the stern and leans far over toward the sea. He falls overboard and is about to drown. Seeing this, the captain throws him a rope, cautioning him to hold on tightly so as not to drown. So too are we, sinful human beings, likened in this world to swimmers in the sea. We cannot be sure, even for the blink of an eye, that we will not drown.⁵⁰

The two mothers, then, frame their advice to their children with similar theological outlooks. Both go on to transmit additional moral instruction to their children. Rivkah states:

[...] And therefore, my pious children, remember your beloved mother; during the days of my life you treated me and my body with respect [...] after my

⁴⁹ For use of the hourglass symbol, indicating the limited time of life in this world, on Jewish gravestones, see, e.g.: Michael Studemund-Halévy, "Die portugiesisch-spanischen Grabinschriften in Norddeutschland: Glückstadt und Emden," *Aschkenas* 7, no. 2 (1997): 389-432.

⁵⁰ *Glikl*, trans. Friedman, 43; *Glikl*, ed. Turniansky, 12.

death please treat my soul with respect, do not abandon it [...] do not cause it, God forbid, to suffer because of you. Dear children, help my soul by not missing prayers in the synagogue, and do not gossip in the synagogue, and say *Kaddish* for me diligently, and live in peace with one another, do not argue amongst yourselves or with other people, do not interfere in arguments, treat your father with respect, be sure to help one another [...] whoever is able, be sure to study Torah every day, whoever is not able, should support Torah scholars. Remember the end of all humans, do good as long as you are able, I am no longer among you in order to remind you. Remember your mother and what she did in the days of her life and what she achieved. Give me satisfaction, and each and every one of you should uphold the words of this will for a memorial, read it every year on the anniversary of my death and after you have read it confess your sins and afterwards ensure that there will be a quorum of scholars on every anniversary of my death and that someone will say *Kaddish* [during] this study.⁵¹

Nowhere in her work does Glikl give instructions regarding her own death. In that sense, it is not a will of the type that Rivkah's text is. The customs described in Rivkah's will, however, bear great similarity to those described by Glikl as those she arranged for on the death of her husband Chaim.⁵² The hopes and worries for their children, the values they seek to pass on, the use of a written text to try to cement those values in the mind and hearts of their children beyond their own lifetimes—all those are shared by both women. Natalie Zemon Davis has demonstrated ways in which early modern families planned and prepared for life trajectories over multiple generations in ways that had not occurred earlier, including parents' wills that instructed children in preserving memory and gratitude towards those parents.⁵³ These Jewish women's ethical wills seem to fit that pattern.

Moreover, Glikl's mention of Pessele's will alongside the surviving text of Rivkah's testifies to the strength of a genre, copied with care, meant to be preserved in families and read periodically. The existence of Rivkah's will concretizes the practice Glikl mentions in passing. Against the physical precariousness of early modern Ashkenazi family papers, this small written record suggests the practice could have been much more widespread; evidence of two such documents becomes exponentially stronger than the survival of just one (discovered to date). Moreover, the instructions to reread the documents at stated times and the evidence of copying within the family—presumably for that purpose—suggest that these documents were not solely written documents, but worked to support additional types of familial memory, such as an annual liturgy that included their recitation.⁵⁴ The historical recovery of women's voices and their lived lives requires careful attention to such scant evidence. All told, it is plausible that Glikl was well aware of women in her circles writing ethical wills. She did not set out to construct her composition based on that model. She might very well have consciously known, however, that while she differed from other women in the shape of what she sought to compose, she shared with them in the very act of putting pen to paper for one's children.

⁵¹ "Rebecca Halfon: Testament (Manheim)," *Posen Library*, vol. 5, 161.

⁵² *Glikl*, trans. Friedman, p. 201; *Glikl*, ed. Turniansky, p. 370.

⁵³ Davis, "Ghosts, Kin, and Progeny," 93-94, 110n15, 110n19, 113n56.

⁵⁴ I have made a similar argument with regard to *memorbücher*, documents kept by early modern synagogues containing names of the dead. Greenblatt, *To Tell Their Children*, 36-37.

Beila Perlhefter's Memorial and a Biblical Parable as Consolation

Perhaps the most striking counterpoint to Glikl, however, is Beila Perlhefter. Glikl's work functions, among other ways, as a memorial to her deceased husband, for her children. In a mirror image of sorts, Beila has left us the introduction to a Yiddish ethical work, *Sefer Be'er Sheva*—the rest of which was written, at her insistence, she tells us, by her husband, a published author of Hebrew books—whose purpose was to memorialize their seven deceased children.⁵⁵ A manuscript of this introduction held at Oxford's Bodleian library includes a version of a biblical story also told by Glikl, and comparing the two versions allows us to see where Glikl stands apart from the educated Jewish women of central Europe in her time in whose circles she traveled and whose background she shared.⁵⁶

Beila was born around 1650 to a prominent Viennese family, who migrated to Prague after the expulsion of Jews from Vienna in 1669. She married Baer Eybeschütz (Shmuel Yissachar Dov Baer, son of Judah Leib Eibeschutz) who took the name of her more prominent family, Perlhefter. From 1674 to early 1676 Baer Perlhefter lived in Altdorf, in the home of Christian Hebraist Johann Christoph Wagenseil (1633–1705), whom Perlhefter taught Hebrew.⁵⁷ During this time, Beila remained in the small Bavarian town Schnaittach, where there was a small Jewish community, with at least one child. From there, she corresponded with Baer, mostly in old Yiddish, and directly with Wagenseil in an elegant, flowery Hebrew that recalls, for this reader, that of the early *maskilim*.⁵⁸ The fluency demonstrates a solid education in Hebrew language. We can only speculate that this was provided by her family. While we possess few clear examples of women who mastered Hebrew to this extent, instances of women from elite rabbinic families attaining advanced levels of Jewish textual expertise are not unheard of.⁵⁹ The correspondence with Wagenseil reveals that she was financially adept, managing the household and advising Baer, as well as knowledgeable in music and dance. They then moved to Modena, where, for approximately five years, Baer was in the close circles of Sabbatian Abraham Rovigo. They had to leave Modena when Baer denounced the Sabbatian Mordecai Eisenstadt, whom he had earlier supported.⁶⁰ Eventually, they returned to Prague, where Baer was involved with publishing interests and served as a rabbinic judge. Thus, Beila

⁵⁵ Perlhefter and Perlhefter, *Be'er Sheva*, ed. Riemer, trans. Senkbeil; Nathanael Riemer, "Zwischen Tradition und Häresie"; Greenblatt, *To Tell Their Children*, 112–15, 181, 185, 198–99.

⁵⁶ The manuscripts and choice of this one for this purpose are described below.

⁵⁷ Niels Eggerz, "Purim in Altdorf," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 71, no. 2 (2019): 176–201; David Malkiel, "Christian Hebraism in a Contemporary Key: The Search for Hebrew Epitaph Poetry in Seventeenth-Century Italy," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96, no. 1 (2006): 123–46.

⁵⁸ Elisheva Carlebach, "The Letters of Bella Perlhefter (1674–75)," *Early Modern Workshop* 2004: *Early Modern Jewries*, Wesleyan University (August 24, 2004).

<https://research.library.fordham.edu/emw/emw2004/emw2004/11/>; Bernard Weinryb, "Historisches und Kulturhistorisches aus Wagenseils hebräischen Briefwechsel," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, new series 47 (1939): 325–41, published the letters located at Leipzig University Library, Leipzig, Germany Ms. B.H. qu. 34 and now viewable at the National Library of Israel's "Ktiv" project: https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/manuscripts/hebrew-manuscripts/itempage?vid=MANUSCRIPTS&docId=PNX_MANUSCRIPTS990026287780205171.

⁵⁹ E.g., Elijah, "Women Writers."

⁶⁰ Malkiel, "Christian Hebraism"; Isaiah Tishby, "The First Sabbatian 'Magid' in the Bet-Midrash of Rabbi Abraham Rovigo," *Zion* 22 (1957): 21–55 [in Hebrew].

and Glikl were almost exact contemporaries. Both lived in German-dominated central Europe. Both were of relatively well-to-do Jewish families, and both had marriages that, based on their own writings, appear to have been highly successful as emotional partnerships. Both were highly literate, and respected by their husbands and other contemporaries in business affairs. Both maintained extensive epistolary networks. Beila appears to have had a much more comprehensive education in Hebrew and traditional Jewish texts—the subject matter that makes up what is broadly referred to as “Torah” or “Talmud Torah”—than did Glikl. Both her birth family and the one she formed with her husband were of the rabbinic class, while Glikl and Chaim were of the respected merchant class. Each woman’s education and, following that, her writing, reflects this social positionality within early modern Ashkenaz’s wealthier—though not the wealthiest—socio-economic strata.

Nathanael Riemer’s detailed study of *Sefer Be’er Sheva*, of which there are nine extant manuscripts, has revealed three editorial stages.⁶¹ A now missing manuscript representing the earliest stage, which Riemer calls X, was owned and described by the early scholar of old Yiddish literature Eleazar Shulman (1837–1904). Eight extant manuscripts, some complete and some partial, represent the Y stage; most were copied in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (one dates from 1739). The continued hand copying of the text attests to the fact that though the book was never printed before the twenty-first century, it continued to be read. Riemer published a manuscript, now housed in Frankfurt, that represents this second stage of editing, and exists in its entirety.⁶² The third stage of editing he outlines, Z, is represented by a single manuscript, housed in Oxford, probably written in the early eighteenth century, of which the introduction and first two of seven books are extant.⁶³ While the themes are consistent, it varies significantly from the one published by Riemer.

This Oxford manuscript is the one on which the current analysis is based, for, following Riemer, it represents a later version of Beila’s introduction, reworked and expanded. It is also the only one Riemer views as “original” to the time of its authors. Glikl’s and Rivkah’s manuscripts were written in an aesthetically pleasing fashion, with title pages, as they envisioned them read by their descendants over the course of generations, and possibly by select outsiders, circulated and preserved within family circles through copying by hand. The Perlhefters’ work shares the aesthetic sensibilities and hand-drawn title page, while also going beyond the scope of the other two, as evidenced by its circulation in manuscript.

⁶¹ Nathanael Riemer, “The Genesis and Manuscripts of *Beer Sheva* by Bella and Beer Perlhefter,” *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 4, no. 1 (2010): 43–89.

⁶² Perlhefter and Perlhefter, *Be’er Sheva*, ed. Riemer, trans. Senkbeil.

⁶³ Ms. Bodleian Opp. 148. From the collections of The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford (Oxford, England). “Ktiv” Project, The National Library of Israel. (not accessible offsite) https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990000932950205171/NLI. Transcription and partial translation of the introduction at: Rachel Greenblatt, “‘My Happiness Overturned’: Mourning, Memory and a Woman’s Writing,” *Early Modern Workshop 2011: Egodocuments: Revelations of Self in the Early Modern Period*, University of Texas at Austin (August 23, 2011), <https://research.library.fordham.edu/emw/emw2011/emw2011/10/>.



Figure 3. Ms Oxford Bodleian 148

Moreover, the intent behind this version—though apparently never achieved—was to prepare it for print. The title page states, in Riemer’s translation:

This book was decided to be printed by the honourable woman, one of the members of the women’s burial society, one of the charitable ... of the Holy Community of Prague, the modest, pious and dear woman Bella, [daughter] of the head of the community ... wife of the accomplished scholar, the prince [of the Torah, our venerated Rav Beer, son] of our venerated Rav Jehuda Love Eibschitz...”⁶⁴

Having, apparently, no surviving children of her own, Beila, with Baer, instead devised a memorial to them, which, in these circumstances, of necessity needed to reach beyond the immediate family circle to serve its function. That this was the version Beila intended to print for an even wider public is another reason to rely on it for the purposes of the analysis at hand.

The text opens with quotes from Ecclesiastes, “the sun rises and the sun sets, and glides back to where it rises,” (Eccl. 1:5) which she relates to the previous verse, “one generation goes, and another comes, but the earth remains the same forever” (Eccl. 1:4). “That means,” Beila goes on to explain, “that one generation goes away from this world, that is to say, a family dies off from this world. And another family is born, but the earth remains eternally.” This introduction works up to a tragic climax:

About this, King Solomon, may he rest in peace, made his analogy and said: “As soon as the sunshine no longer shines, so is its light not lost, but rather lights in heaven, more brightly than it lights this world.” It happened in the

⁶⁴ Riemer, “Genesis,” 73. I would speculate that the missing portions of this manuscript may never have been completed, whether as result or cause for the abandonment of the project of bringing it to print.

same manner to me, Beila daughter of the officer, the honored Rabbi Yaakov Perlhefter z”l, from the holy community of Prague, wife of the learned in Torah, highly esteemed, our teacher Rabbi Baer Eibenschutz, rabbinic judge, may his maker protect him, here in Prague, the unstable times wreaked havoc and the unfortunate hours surrounded [me] entirely, and my good fortune and happiness that I had (with) my children was overthrown, and I continue daily to endure their death and suffer its pain. Four boys and three girls who were born to me were lost to me in the deathly time. And, so great was my sorrow, I could not tell out from in.⁶⁵

She explains that her husband, Baer, was able to offer consolation: he brought “proofs and analogies and stories from the Gemara and Midrash about children’s death . . . And his words gave me comfort” and that she urged him, on that basis, to record these words of consolation in a book so that others could also benefit. Beila reports that Baer objected, as he was in the midst of writing several Hebrew-language books.⁶⁶ Beila writes:

But I pleaded with him so long and reminded him of the words of our sages who said in Ethics of the Fathers, “Be careful with a minor commandment as with a major one, for you do not know the reward of a commandment” (Ethics of the Fathers 2:1). That means that a person should be as careful to perform a commandment that is little regarded by people, still he should perform it, so while it is all for the good that he is occupied with performing a difficult or esteemed commandment, so one cannot know for which commandment God gives a greater reward, when God loves one commandment more; so it is appropriate for you, in the right time, to do more than the other (commandments) that one can always perform, so long as a person lives. Therefore it is appropriate that you write me this book in this time, for another such book is always needed.” And indeed, when my husband heard such words from me, my words appealed to him very well and he said to me: “Because you have indeed spoken a word of wisdom, so I will write such for you with God’s help, so that you and the other mourning hearts will find a consolation or joy in the book.”⁶⁷

Beila thus bested Baer’s preference for rabbinic works by use of a rabbinic proof. For Beila, who knew Hebrew and wielded classical source texts with apparent ease, to insist on Yiddish fits with her stated objective that this book provide comfort to many. Nowhere does either Beila, or Baer in his acquiescence, specify that these expected readers will all be female. While the implication seems to be that most would be, there is nothing to suggest that grieving men could not likewise be included. The resulting work, *Sefer Be’er Sheva*, is divided into seven “gates,” each named for one of the couple’s deceased children. That Beila was truly the author of

⁶⁵ Ms. Bodleian Opp. 148, 4v; in Greenblatt, “My Happiness Overturned,” 117 and appendices (<https://research.library.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1112&context=emw>).

⁶⁶ One of the proofs Riemer gives for the Oxford manuscript as the third (Z) stage of editing as that it refers to these Hebrew works as books Baer had been in the midst of editing, while the second (Y) stage manuscripts refer to this writing in the present tense.

⁶⁷ Ms. Bodleian Opp. 148; In Greenblatt, “My Happiness Overturned,” 118 and appendices (<https://research.library.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1112&context=emw>).

the introduction is reinforced by the earlier version, printed by Riemer, in which Beila's name is worked into the text through an acrostic, in a concluding poem cut from the later version used here.⁶⁸

Both Beila, of the rabbinic elite, and Glikl, of the relatively wealthy merchant class, participated in the classic Jewish practice of employing biblical and rabbinic texts and narratives as raw materials for framing the transmission of values. Both drew on the very same biblical story as a mode of offering consolation for the death of a child.⁶⁹ Both retell a story about King David based on a passage from II Samuel 12:15-24. In this story, David desired Batsheva, the wife of his general, Uriyah, for himself, so he sent Uriyah to sure death in battle and married Batsheva, who bore a son. David refused to recognize his culpability in Uriyah's death, so, through the prophet Nathan, God caused the baby to become gravely ill. Beila relates the main plot line and its attendant message in a few simple lines. Glikl, in contrast, tells the story in a manner that draws her reader in, builds suspense, then finally lays out the lesson. The appended charts, one in English and one in the original Hebrew or Yiddish, show how the story continues in four sources: the biblical text, the Yiddish adaptation of it known as the *Shmuel bukh*, Glikl's memoirs, and Beila's introduction.⁷⁰ *Shmuel bukh* is a paraphrase of the Book of Samuel (Augsburg, 1544, with later editions), written in verse, in rhyming quatrains of *aabb*.⁷¹ I have not introduced it here in order to propose that either woman relied on this text as her source, although whether they did is a question worth asking. Women absorbed biblical and rabbinic texts in different ways: some read Hebrew themselves; most read them in Yiddish translations, including the best known among them, the *Tsene-rene*, an adaptation of the *Chumash* (five Books of Moses), *Haftarot* and *Megillot* with numerous aggadic interpretations.⁷² Some heard the stories told in synagogue sermons or other settings. And, as Turniansky points out, the linguistic elements of this literature, the raw materials of Jewish knowledge, were thoroughly integrated into the spoken and written vernacular Yiddish.⁷³ Rather, I bring up the *Shmuel bukh* as an example of an additional, widely-available version of the story, told in the language in which Glikl and Beila told it, as a further point of

⁶⁸ Hellerstein, "The Name in the Poem."

⁶⁹ For places where Baer, in the body of *Sefer Be'er Sheva*, and Glikl share source materials, see Riemer, "Some Parallels." Riemer does not discuss the King David story examined here, nor any material from Beila's introduction.

⁷⁰ The English sources: *Tanakh* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), II Samuel 12: 16-24; Jerold C. Frakes, trans. "Book of Samuel," in *Early Yiddish Epic*, ed. Jerold C. Frakes (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 111-12; Glikl, trans. Friedman, 143-44; Greenblatt, "My Happiness Overturned," 117-18, 123

(<https://research.library.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1112&context=emw>). The Yiddish sources: *Sefer shmuel: Dos bukh Shmuel in taytsher shprakh* (Augsburg, 1544)

<https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10170884-2>; Glikl, ed. Turniansky, 240, 242.

⁷¹ Oren Roman Cohen is currently preparing a new critical edition. For now, see Felix Falk and Lajb Fuks, *Das Schemuelbuch des Mosche Esrin Wearba, ein biblisches Epos aus dem 15.*

Jahrhundert (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1961). In addition to the Augsburg print listed above, another available online is: Isaak ben Aaron aus Prossnitz, *Sefer Shemu'el* (Krakow, 1593),

<https://onb.digital/result/10A40AD5> (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek). On the poetic structure: Oren Roman, "Be-nign Shmuel-bukh: On the Melody (or Melodies) Mentioned in Old-Yiddish Epics," *Aschkenas* 25, no. 1 (July 2015): 145-60.

⁷² Jacob Elbaum and Chava Turniansky, "Tsene-rene," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Tsene-rene> (accessed May 6, 2024).

⁷³ Turniansky, "Introduction," in *Glikl*, trans. Friedman, 19-22.

comparison—beyond the Hebrew language original—in presenting a context for the versions brought by our protagonists.

Almost immediately upon introducing the David story, Beila jumps to its central message. The manuscript reads: “One can learn this from King David, may he rest in peace, whose first son—born to him by Batsheva—died. So he went into the bath and ate and drank and was well.” Only then does she backtrack to fill in the missing background: “While beforehand, during the child’s illness, he had been very sad, and fasted, but after the child’s death he was cheerful.” Then comes the king’s explanation for this curious behavior:

While the child was ill, I prayed to God that He would make the child healthy again; however, now that the child is dead, it is not appropriate for a person to mourn more over him, for I cannot make him alive again, and the moaning and crying will be understood as if God had given him an unjust judgment, and all men must die in the end, so I will come to him in the world to come. So there, I will be able to be happy with him.⁷⁴

The point her husband Baer is making, so Beila tells her readers, is that:

So you too [Beila] can well learn from King David, that one should not mourn for dead people. And why would you want to understand these things better than King David understood them, he upon whom the holy spirit rested? Therefore, let your mourning come to an end and be consoled.⁷⁵

Some of today’s readers may find the text patronizing; why must Beila be addressed in this manner by her husband? Beila herself, however, signals its transmission in positive terms. I would suggest that her appreciation of Baer’s explanation may stem not from a lack of knowledge or self-confidence on her own part, but from the depths of her grief, grief that overwhelms cognition. I read the passage innocently, not as an artificial literary device, but as a simple factual explanation of the genesis of the book. The report of this exchange between husband and wife may also, perhaps, constitute the record of one of the ways in which women less literate in Jewish text than Beila came to acquire great stores of knowledge, through simple conversation.

Glikl’s ultimate purpose in including the story is quite similar to Beila’s—it draws on biblical narrative to offer consolation—but her mode of telling differs significantly. Glikl relates the story as a commentary that she, as author, directs—or wishes she could direct—at her younger, grieving self. In reference to the death of her three-year-old daughter Matte, she writes, “I was not wise enough to recall the late devout King David whose firstborn, the son he had with Bathsheba, suffered from an illness.”⁷⁶ Then, Glikl, master storyteller, draws out the plot, building suspense. It is possible she worked from a source text that is not known to me, and it is possible that she compiled the story from multiple versions she had heard and/or read over a lifetime. What matters for my purposes here is the manner in which she

⁷⁴ Greenblatt, “My Happiness Overturned,” 117.

(<https://research.library.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1112&context=emw>). Texts appear in the appendices below.

⁷⁵ Greenblatt, “My Happiness Overturned,” 117-18 and attached appendices

(<https://research.library.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1112&context=emw>).

⁷⁶ *Glikl*, trans. Friedman, 143, and appendices to this article.

chose to put the narrative down on paper. In common with the texts in both II Samuel and in the *Shmuel bukh*, and in contrast to Beila, Glikl begins by laying out the background, “During the bouts of illness, King David observed mourning, fasted, gave to charity, and prayed.” Like these other two (though in different words), and in contrast to Beila, she next describes the tension felt in David’s court when the infant died:

When the boy died, all the king’s servants fell silent and kept it a secret, saying: “The king observed mourning when the boy was ill and there was some hope that he would live—what will the king do now, once he finds out that the boy is dead and there is no longer any hope?” So no one would say a thing.⁷⁷

In II Samuel and *Shmuel bukh*, the king sees or hears his servants’ subsequent whispering amongst themselves and demands to hear the truth, that the infant has died. In Glikl’s version, “devout King David inferred from [the servants’] silence that the boy was dead. He asked the servants if the boy was dead, but no one replied. Thus he realized that his beloved son was indeed dead.”⁷⁸ This David learns from silence, rather than from whispers. As a skillful writer, Glikl has evoked emotion by showing the actions and words of the king and his court, rather than naming them, portraying the servants’ emotion—fear—by means of their (in)action—silence. Glikl’s description of the following stage is the longest of all the four versions. It embellishes the story and imparts to King David practices of both supplication and response to death characteristic of her own time and place, rather than his, such as giving to charity as a response to distress. Only Glikl’s telling depicts David reciting the Hebrew phrase characteristic of later tradition, “Blessed are You, true judge, the Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord forever and ever.”⁷⁹ Only then does she arrive at the message to be learned:

The king told them: “I will tell you, my loyal servants. While the boy was ill and still had a soul, I did everything possible. I wailed, screamed, I repented, prayed, gave to charity, thinking perhaps God, blessed be He, would show mercy and heal him. But when all this was to no avail, and God, blessed be He, has taken back his pledge, what good is wailing and weeping? My son will never come back to us; we shall go to him.” You see, then, how the late devout King David behaved. We must learn from this and leave everything in God’s hands.⁸⁰

While the nuances differ from the story as related by Beila, the two bereaved mothers share the practice of framing consolation through biblical material, and use the same story to do so.

In these passages, Glikl and her contemporary Beila, another highly literate Jewish woman of a similar background, display their shared cultural heritage and religious outlook. Neither expresses lack of self-confidence in regard to using the

⁷⁷ Glikl, trans. Friedman, 143, and appendices to this article.

⁷⁸ Glikl, trans. Friedman, 143, and appendices to this article.

⁷⁹ Glikl, trans. Friedman, 143, and appendices to this article. Cf. Debra Kaplan, *The Patrons and Their Poor: Jewish Community and Public Charity in Early Modern Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

⁸⁰ Glikl, trans. Friedman, 143-44, and appendices to this article.

technology of writing to disseminate a message that might prove useful to others as well. The contemporary reader might find it odd that neither woman expresses any interest in Batsheva's point of view, or concern for the suffering brought to her through David's sinful actions. Neither refers to the narrative that precedes and follows the story of the infant's death: its conception in a sexual assault on Batsheva perpetrated by David (some traditional commentaries dispute this reading), and its culmination in its portrayal of the subsequent conception of Batsheva and David's second son Solomon, the future king, as "consolation" for the death of their first. Perhaps Beila and Glikl reject the subsequent pregnancy as consolation? Though tempting, we have no evidence for such an interpretation.⁸¹

While they share the raw materials, Glikl's dramatization of the King's explanation builds suspense in a way Beila's does not. Glikl's rendition also offers more details—or, one could say, embellishment—painting a more vivid picture than do Beila or the biblical or published Yiddish texts. We see, then, similarity in Glikl's and Beila's cultural language, and in their impulse to draw on it, in writing aimed at outside readers, as a way to frame and interpret events in their own lives. Yet, at the same time, Glikl has displayed artistry as a writer lacking from Beila's prose.

Concluding Thoughts

Reading Glikl alongside two contemporaries, Rivkah bat Avraham, wife of Chaim Sinzheim, and Beila bat Yaakov Perlhefter, helps to reveal underexplored realms in which early modern Ashkenazi women lived, worked, and wrote. The existence of a genre of ethical wills by women, attested to by Rivkah and Pessele—as documented by Glikl—suggests a concern these women shared with passing on to children and descendants Jewishly-based, familial values, alongside perpetuation of their own memory, and the use of a specific literary form to do so. This form was likely, I would suggest, among Glikl's sources of inspiration as she wrote. That she did not herself write an ethical will does not negate it as a model, among other models. All three—Glikl, Pessele, and Rivkah—received educations that allowed for understanding of and participation in planning and conducting their families' financial affairs. All three displayed concern with sharing with their husbands in shaping their children's fortunes and behaviors beyond their own lifetimes. Beila, it seems, had an education that included this same financial literacy and went beyond it in formal Jewish letters. Reading her preface alongside Glikl's seven "small books" brings to light additional possible sources or inspirations for parts of Glikl's work: women who heard, told and retold biblical and rabbinic stories in framing the lessons they sought to teach their children and others as well. The use of the same biblical story suggests there could be a specific corpus of Jewish texts (written and/or oral) that were particularly drawn upon by women. Whether or not that is the case, reading the two women chips at the supposed boundaries between Jewish men's text-based framings of the meanings of their daily lives and the realms inhabited by

⁸¹ For a survey of feminist interpretations of this story, see Kristine Henriksen Garroway, "Was Bathsheba the Original Bridget Jones? A New Look at Bathsheba on Screen and in Biblical Scholarship," *Nashim* 24 (2013): 53–73. And for another reading of the story as relate to David's process of sin and repentance: Natan Levin, "Rebuke, Repentance and Renewal: A Literary Analysis of David's Character in II Samuel 12," *Lehrhaus* (June 5, 2023): <https://thelehrhaus.com/tanakh/rebuke-repentance-and-renewal-a-literary-analysis-of-davids-character-in-ii-samuel-12/>

early modern Ashkenazi women. At the same time, reading the two together highlights the unique literary talents Glikl possessed.

Glikl, then, was extraordinary as a writer, but not wholly unique in her education and cultural upbringing. Women of her circles wrote, often in manuscript meant to be circulated and read, sometimes in print. This simple statement is but a starting point. Much early modern Yiddish women's writing remains to be discovered, read, and analyzed. What role did this writing play for Jewish women and men? For many male writers in early modern Ashkenaz, for instance, authorship of a book became a matter of professional pride. Like contemporary academics, early modern European rabbis worked hard to bolster their lists of publications—highlighted in introductions to their works, on their gravestones—and also lamented the inability to print work they held still in manuscript, usually for lack of sufficient funds.⁸² For women, the meaning of authorship differed. And the relationship of this Jewish corpus, which has barely begun to be uncovered, to other European women's writing of the time would be an additional next step.⁸³ Jewish women, for example, wrote differently than did women of Catholic religious orders, who had outlets, time, and spaces not available to Jewish women.⁸⁴ It matters, as well, *why* it comes as such a surprise that these women wrote, and what has blocked their writings from coming down to us. The analysis presented here is meant, all told, as a beginning rather than an end.

⁸² Greenblatt, *To Tell Their Children*, 107-12.

⁸³ The scholarship is vast and includes the book series *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (<https://othervoicemc.com/>), online databases such as Perdita Manuscripts (a subscription database of Adam Matthews Primary Sources, <https://www.perditamanuscripts.amdigital.co.uk/>) and Women Writers Project (founded in 1986 as Brown Women Writers' Project, <https://www.wwp.northeastern.edu/>), and much, much more.

⁸⁴ E.g., Charlotte Woodford, "Women as Historians: The Case of Early Modern German Convents," *German Life and Letters* 52, no. 3 (1999): 271–80.