

man Pietists alike were quite familiar with various kinds of midrashic texts and methods. *Tosafot* passages frequently cited Bereshit Rabbah (*BerR*), most often in talmudic contexts but occasionally to interpret the biblical verse at hand. A (German) student of the mid-13th-century northern French tosafists, R. Yehi'el of Paris and R. Toviyah of Vienne reports that he checked the *BerR* texts of both of his teachers in order to properly understand a passage in Rashi's Torah commentary, suggesting that interest in and familiarity with midrashic interpretation was quite common in this period. R. Yehi'el of Paris, and his colleague R. Moses of Coucy, also cited biblical comments made by R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, even as their contemporaries, R. Moses and R. Isaac of Evreux, preferred to offer midrashic interpretations that often began with passages from *BerR*. The German Pietists developed their own unique methods of midrashic interpretation. Ashkenazic midrashic interpretations were even developed to explain and to justify the contours of martyrdom in the medieval period (and the nature of martyrdom in earlier periods as well).

From the middle of the 13th century and through the early decades of the 14th century, a series of so-called tosafist Torah commentaries appeared. These were primarily compilatory works, whose authors or editors were either anonymous or otherwise unknown rabbinic figures. tosafist biblical interpretations were cited, but they were joined with other figures and methods. Indeed, these compilations as a whole brought together many of the aforementioned approaches and figures, as well as tosafist talmudic passages and interpretations. It would seem that the goal of these works was to provide laymen with a kind of digest of biblical and talmudic interpretation, based on the weekly Torah portion. The compilers or editors were themselves members of the secondary elite, who wished to preserve this earlier material from the heyday of the tosafist period together with some of their own biblical interpretations and insights for a wider lay audience. Some of the later works in this genre also made use of various Spanish and Provençal exegetes including Ibn Ezra, Radaq and Nahmanides.

Full-fledged interpretations to the books of the Prophets and Writings were not very common in medieval Ashkenaz, with the notable exception of those by Rashi. Rashbam apparently interpreted many of these books (although only a handful of his commentaries have survived) as did his fellow *pashtanim*, R. Joseph Qara and R. Eliezer of Beaugency. Rabbenu Tam composed a commentary to the book of Job, and fragments of R. Joseph Bekhor Shor's commentary to the book of Psalms are extant. It would appear that the commentaries attributed to R. Isaiah b. Mali of Trani are in fact his (and do not belong to his grandson R. Isaiah b. Elijah), although R. Isaiah's Italian origins perhaps make

him somewhat exceptional in this regard. Several tosafists authored commentaries to some or all of the Five Scrolls, which were read seasonally.

In the early modern period, more formal and systematic super-commentaries to Rashi's commentary to the Torah were composed. Among the leading eastern European *aharonim* in the 15th and 16th centuries who composed such commentaries are R. Solomon Luria (Maharshal), Maharal of Prague, R. Mordecai Jaffe (Ba'al ha-Levushim) and R. David ha-Levi (Ba'al ha-Taz). In his *Keli Yeqar*, R. Solomon Ephraim Luntshits went beyond his observations on the commentary of Rashi to include more extensive midrashic interpretations, as well as personal and societal exhortations developed on the basis of the biblical text. The greater availability of medieval Spanish exegesis and exegetical methods in this period also impacted the nature of biblical study in Eastern Europe. R. Yom Tov Lipmann Heller wrote on the Torah commentary of R. Bahya b. Asher, and he composed glosses to the commentary of Ibn Ezra. At the same time, leading rabbinic scholars such as R. Joseph Yuspa Hahn (in his *Yosef Omets*) chastised his contemporaries for their lack of interest in biblical studies.

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## Ashkenazi, Eliezer ben Elijah ha-Rofe

→ Eliezer ben Elijah ha-Rofe Ashkenazi

## Ashkenazim

This term was used to characterize the Jews of various lands in Christian Europe during the high Middle Ages, including Germany, northern France, Austria, and Bohemia, as well as the Jews of central and eastern Europe in the early modern period and beyond. It served to distinguish these Jewries from their counterparts (Sefaradim) in Spain and other lands that were originally part of the Moslem world. Ashkenazim had a distinct pronunciation of Hebrew, and there were differences in the wording of the standard prayers and especially in the liturgical poetry (*piyyutim*) that were added to their liturgy. Moreover, Ashkenazic methods of talmudic study and codification were different than those of the Sefaradim. These differences were brought into sharp focus (and partially resolved) with the publi-

cation of the *Shulhan 'Arukh* and its Ashkenazic glosses and commentaries. Although Ashkenazim during the Middle Ages were not typically familiar with scientific and philosophical traditions that were more commonly taught among the Sefaradim, there were contacts between these groups within the realms of both talmudic and biblical interpretation. The direction and degree of influence, however, is often a matter of scholarly conjecture or debate.

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## Ashmedai

→ Asmodeus

## Ashnah

### 1. In the District of Azekah

Ashnah (MT <sup>ʾ</sup>*Ašnā*), mentioned only once in the Bible, is located in the Shephelah (“lowlands”; Josh 15:33), in the region of Azekah. LXX<sup>B</sup> renders the name as Ἀσσα, while LXX<sup>A</sup> and some other manuscripts read with the MT, Ἀωνα. The Peshitta reads as *ʾštn*. The identification of this town remains uncertain.

### 2. In the District of Libnah

A second town with the same name, Ashnah is listed in the same district as Libnah and Achzib in the Shephelah (Josh 15:43). While LXX<sup>B</sup> renders the name as Ἰάνα (cf. Vetus Latina *Idna*), other Greek witnesses have *σεννα*, *ασενα* and *ασεννα*, all supporting MT’s *ʾšnh*. Eusebius also referred to this town as *Ασεννα* (*Onom.* 26:6). In the Peshitta, although the order of the towns is different from the MT, Ashnah is represented as *ʾšy*. The identification of this town is uncertain. Abel (255) had suggested (on the basis of Vetus Latina *Idna*, about 13 km northwest of Hebron. While Rainey (11) supports this identification, Kallai (386) would only say that its location should be sought to the north of Tell Bet Mirsim, which he identified with Ashan.

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## Ashpenaz

The word Ashpenaz (MT <sup>ʾ</sup>*Ašpēnaz*; LXX Ἀσφανεζ) occurs in the Hebrew Bible only at Dan 1:3. It refers to the person appointed to place selected young

Israelites under Babylonian training. However, the meaning and function of the word itself is unclear. Scholars are uncertain whether it should be taken as the personal name of the court official or as a descriptive title of his function (e.g., “the majordomo” or inn-keeper of the royal palace), or whether the word itself is misspelled. An almost identical form occurs as a name in an incantation text from the ancient Mesopotamian city of Nippur (Montgomery: 124; Collins: 134). Related discussions have arisen because of this general uncertainty over the word. Lipiński is credited for the view that the text originally read *rab ʾašpēnaz* “master of the lodging” (derived from the Old Persian word *ašpinja* “lodging, inn”) before it was expanded to the present *ʾašpēnaz rab sārīsim* “Ashpenaz, master of court staff” by an editor who mistook *ʾašpēnaz* to be a proper name (so Lacocque: 21).

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## Ashtar

Ashtar is an astral god, probably the morning star Venus.

The often alleged presence of Ashtar at Ebla under the spelling <sup>d</sup>*aš-dar* probably indicates the goddess Ishtar (Pomponio/Xella: 63–67; but Smith: 628–29). In the 14th century BCE, Ashtar appears at Emar as <sup>d</sup>*Aš-tar MUL* “Ashtar of stars,” while in the Ugaritic texts he is presented as a warrior and a potential candidate for the divine kingship instead of Baal (KTU 1.2.III:18–23; 1.6.I:43–65). At Ugarit Ashtar is praised with the epithet *ʾrz* meaning “powerful, awesome” and he is equated with the Hurrian warrior god Ashtabi.

Ashtar occurs as a theophorous element in many Aramaic personal names and in the name *ʾštrkmš* in the Moabite inscription of Mesha (KAI 181:17). At Palmyra Ashtar appears in the compound name of the god Bōlʾastōr (Dirven: 45).

In the South Arabian pantheon Ashtar holds a high rank and many inscriptions describe him as an astral deity, occasionally as a provider of water (Smith: 634–36).

The name Ashtar does not appear in the Hebrew Bible, but many scholars identify the expression “O Day Star, son of Dawn” (Isa 14:12) with the god Ashtar, and they postulate a Ugaritic mythological background in Isa 14:12–15 (Day; Heiser).

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