

Cimmerians and Scythians as paired nations in the same area. The similarities in Gomer/Gimirrai/Cimmerians has led scholars to make a similar association with Ashkenaz/Ashkuza/Scythians. If correct, the people of Ashkenaz or Scythians were Indo-European in background, first settling in southern Europe to the north of the Black Sea. They moved and displaced the Cimmerians and settled around Lake Urmia. They engaged in military campaigns against Assyria, developing a militaristic reputation and ruling the northern Near East for a time.

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II. Judaism

The name Ashkenaz is first mentioned among the descendants of Noah (Gen 10: 3). It becomes identified with Germany (and especially the Rhineland) somewhere before the 10th century. From there, as German Jews spread westward to France and further eastward to Austria and Bohemia, the term Ashkenaz takes on the larger connotation of those areas that followed the religious and cultural traditions of earlier Rhineland Jewry. With the emigration of Ashkenazic Jewry from western to eastern Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries, the center of gravity shifts to Moravia, Poland, and Lithuania.

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See also → Ashkenaz, Reception of the Bible in;
→ Ashkenazim; → German Pietism

Ashkenaz, Reception of the Bible in

Already in the period prior to the First Crusade and continuing through the Middle Ages, the text of the Bible served as an introduction to the reading and understanding of Hebrew for elementary-level students. In addition, tutors (*melammedim*) taught the weekly Torah portion together with the Aramaic Targum, and later with Rashi's commentary, and often taught other books of the Bible as well. Rabbenu Gershom (d. 1028) discusses the case of a *melammed* who was contracted to teach his young pupil "all of Scripture" and subsequently claimed that he had done so. The sections in *Sefer Ḥasidim* (ca. 1200) that discuss biblical studies for children attempted to guide that study, not create it.

The text of the Bible and its interpretation were studied in the leading Rhineland academies of Mainz and Worms during the 11th century, although the literary remains of that study are not extensive. Thus, Rashi's commentaries to the Bible were not composed in a vacuum, and his preferred method (as per his comment to Gen 3:8) of presenting "straightforward scriptural interpretations as well as aggadic or midrashic interpretations that

resolved exegetical questions according to the context of the verses" reflects the tenor and goals of biblical studies in these academies. The deep familiarity of pre-Crusade rabbinic scholarship with the biblical corpus, and their reverence for it, is also evident in the instances in which leading decisors addressed halakhic questions and problems on the basis of biblical versions and their interpretation.

Nonetheless, the oft-cited formulation by the leading Tosafist (and grandson of Rashi), R. Jacob Tam of Ramerupt (d. 1171), that through study of the Babylonian Talmud (which Rabbenu Tam characterizes as a "mixture" of Scripture, Mishnah and gemara) one fulfills his obligation to study all of these areas or genres, suggests that tosafists saw and studied the Bible mainly as an adjunct to the Talmud and the halakhic process. This was indeed how several contemporary Spanish and Provençal biblical exegetes viewed the tosafist approach to biblical interpretation. At the same time, however, it must be noted that two of the so-called northern French *pashṭanim*, including Rabbenu Tam's older brother Rashbam and his student, R. Joseph ben Isaac Bekhor Shor of Orleans, were committed to both the tosafist method of talmudic study and to an appreciation (and extensive formulation) of *peshat* interpretation of the biblical text in its own right. Moreover, manuscript evidence suggests that two other students of Rabbenu Tam, R. Jacob of Orleans and R. Yom Tov of Joigny, as well as several tosafists in the first half of the 13th century including R. Isaiah b. Mali of Trani (who studied with R. Simḥah of Speyer) and R. Moses of Coucy, also composed quite a few *peshat* comments to the Torah, following the models of Rashi and Bekhor Shor (and serving as non-systematic super-commentaries), if not that of Rashbam.

The same type of approach can be found in the relatively simple comments to the Torah that R. Judah the Pious (d. 1217) transmitted to his son Moses Zal(t)man. To be sure, R. Judah and other members of the German Pietists, especially R. Judah's student R. Eleazar of Worms, also interpreted the Bible in esoteric ways, and suggested numerous *gematriyot* and related forms of interpretation that can best be characterized as *remez*. These forms of interpretation, which also included interpretations based on the nuances of the MT, were preserved and developed further by one of the last of the tosafists, R. Meir of Rothenburg (and in turn by his young German student, R. Jacob b. Asher Ba'al ha-Turim, who later emigrated to Spain). Several Ashkenazic treatises on the workings of the MT are extant in manuscript, including one by Rabbenu Tam's student, R. Menaḥem of Joigny.

R. Eleazar of Worms also authored a lengthy commentary to Midrash Ekhah Rabbah, and he cautioned Torah scholars to familiarize themselves with all of the books of the Bible. Tosafists and Ger-

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-