Rivkah bat Meir: Subtle Redefinition of Gender Roles within the Confines of Traditional Jewish Society

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Conventional narratives of the Jews during the early modern period largely relegate women to marginalized positions.[1] For historians, however, adhering solely to this perspective would risk neglecting the various ways in which women used their subordinate status to their advantage, altering or creating roles for themselves within the niche they were allowed to participate: their home. One of the most remarkable examples was that of "Meneket Rivkah," a treatise by Rivkah bat Meir,[2] the first Jewish text written by a Jewish woman intended for Jewish women.[3] Analysis of this momentous primary source document, its contextual information, as well as its role among other contemporary sources, provides a new perspective on women's roles in *Ashkenazi* Jewish society.[4] Rivkah bat Meir was remarkable for her ability to advance women's importance in the religious community, while carefully working within the confines of the limitations imposed upon women by the Jewish religious authorities. In this way, the example of her work sheds light on how Jewish women, contrary to popular belief, managed to circumvent and sometimes even subvert restrictions placed upon them in order to attain more voice in the community.

Rivkah bat Meir wrote in 16th century Prague, the city home to one of the largest and most vibrant *Ashkenazi* Jewish communities of the time. Jews in Prague lived in ghettos that functioned more as protective sanctuaries than segregated communities. The boundaries of the Jewish quarter were porous, which allowed for extensive interactions between Jews and Christians, a situation characteristic of early modern societies.[5] Furthermore, because the Habsburg Empire granted the Jews free trade, the marketplaces where both men and women freely traded served as points of constant contact between Jews and those outside their community.[6] Prague, then under the rule of Rudolph II, experienced vast economic and cultural expansion,[7] and the Emperor invited Jews into the city to exploit their financial capital through obligatory loans in exchange for privileges.[8] Jews historically had a positive relationship with

1 The early modern period considered in this paper is roughly the time period between the Spanish expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 and the French revolution in 1789.

2 Rivkah bat Meir was an educated woman in 16th century Prague who wrote *Meneket Rivkah*, the most prominent Yiddish text written by a Yiddish woman. Fluent in both Yiddish and Hebrew, Rivkah worked as a writer and preacher on Jewish ethics. These works provide insight into the lives of early modern Jewish women. For more information on Rivkah bat Meir, see Frauke Von. Rohden's introduction to the 2008 edition of *Meneket Rivkah*. For more information on Jewish women and Jewish communities in the Early Modern period, see Greenblatt's *To Tell Their Children: Jewish Communal Memory,* Ellen M. Umansky and Dianne Ashton's *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's* Spirituality, and Chava Weissler's *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women*.

3 Prayer books written by women existed at the time, but these books lacked the didactic nature of *Meneket Rivkah.* For more information on *tkhines* and Jewish women's devotional literature, see Weissler.

4 Ashkenazi Jews were Jews of central and eastern European descent.

Cohen & Rosman, *Rethinking European Jewish History*, 24. Ashkenazi Jews were constantly in motion, migrating in search of better economic conditions. They held fluid political affiliations, spoke their own language (Yiddish), and had their own laws customs, collection of autonomous Jewish administrative and social institutions, and civil educational intellectual religious networks.

5 Early Modern Istanbul, Venice, and Amsterdam were home to Jewish communities that constantly interacted with those outside of the community. *Rethinking European Jewish History* includes a chapter entitled "Jewish Cultural History in early modern Europe, which describes in detail the elements of the early modern period that included mobility and social mixing. For specific communities: Please see Yaron Ben-Naeh *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans* (19-51) for more information on Jews in Istanbul, Robert C. David & Benjamin Ravid's *The Jews of Early Modern Venice* (3-30) for more information on Early Modern Venice, and David Biale *Cultures of the Jews* (641-666) for more information on Early Modern Amsterdam. Greenblatt, 23. "Christians, be they residents or travelers, could enter the Jewish quarter and interact with its inhabitants." Greenblatt describes how court painters entered the Quarter, travelers spoke freely with the Jewish inhabitants, and all were allowed to enter their synagogues during services.

6 Greenblatt, 31. Describes how the market place served as a constant point of interaction between Jews and gentiles in Prague.

Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan. "Early Modern Jewish Communities (Four): Prague." Northwestern University. Evanston, IL. 5 November 2015. Court painters entered, travelers spoke freely with them, and all were allowed to enter their synagogues during services.

Greenblatt, 23. "Christians, be they residents or travelers, could enter the Jewish quarter and interact with its inhabitants." For more information on Jews and the Habsburg monarchy, please see *Jewish Money* by Joshua Teplitsky.

7 Rohden, *Meneket Rivkah,* 3.

8 Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan; Rohden, 3. Jews were welcome by the Habsburgs as a source of financial exploitation, which through cooperation with loans to the emperor gained the privilege of engaging in crafts otherwise prohibited in other European countries. Greenblatt, 24. "Under Rudolf, Jews were allowed to take up some trades often forbidden to them in Europe, as, for example, embroiderers, shoemakers, and other crafts related to textiles, and as musicians, some of whom even

the Habsburg monarchy, both benefitting from its protection and depending legally upon it to renew privileges.[9] Resentment from burghers (Christian landowners) who suffered from Jewish competition led to sporadic expulsions of Jews from the city, but these expulsions were largely symbolic and as a result, Jews continued to reside in the city.[10] *Ashkenazi* Jews overall held fluid political affiliations because of their constant migration over the European continent. They spoke their own language (Yiddish), lived by their own laws and customs, and enjoyed a degree of autonomy in administration, social institutions, as well as civil, kinship, intellectual, and religious networks.[11] Jewish community leaders both represented the community's affairs before external authorities, and oversaw all internal affairs, including enforcing *Halakhah*-Jewish laws that regulated the community. [12]

Women in this time period faced various limitations under Jewish law, but were allotted almost complete free reign in the household. An ideal woman was to be pure, modest, pious, charitable, and supportive. The ideal of a supportive woman centered on women's role at home: their diligence in the household allowed their husbands to turn attention to fulfill their duties in the religious community.[13] Women were supposed to be "house makers, mothers and unobtrusive submissive facilitators of spiritual and material accomplishments of husbands and sons," and to help men fulfill their duties women needed rudimentary spiritual and religious education.[14]

Women's general absence in the public sphere had its basis in the rabbinical authorities' fears fostered by stereotypes about women and their sexual allure.[15] Synagogues' original architecture thus did not provide space for women; instead, they sat in a gallery formed from an external addition to the building.[16] Another reason women were banned from participation was that they were expected to focus on the family and their duties within the domestic sphere. While faith for women amounted to no more than prayers and charitable deeds, faith for men encompassed that in business practice, charity, and regular attendance of synagogue.[17] A woman should not lose herself in worship for the sake of her family's well-being, as this would compromise the duty God set for women.[18] Jewish women were essentially bred for marriage, the purpose of which was to connect wealthy and scholarly families. This, on the other hand, provided them with easy access to Jewish education, albeit a limited one.[19] Women's education, with the exception of that of the wealthiest Jewish women, consisted of learning the mechanics of reading with little emphasis on comprehension, while others had no formal education at all. However, the knowledge explosion thanks to the emergence of the printed book gave women easier access to knowledge previously unavailable to them. The fear that

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played at court."

Klein, *The 1603 Assembly in Frankfurt,* 119. "Accordingly, Emperor Rudolf II firmly believed that the Jews had to be aware that they had been 'granted' neither a territory nor the 'seigniorage of a superior status, high authority or sphere'; rather, they were tolerated 'allein precario' (until revoked, temporarily] in the empire and therefore they 'remain obliged to continuous displays of gratitude, subjection and deference'. Each action on the part of the Jews is only possible owing to privileges previously granted by the emperor, which excludes from the very outset every procedure against the emperor and the imperial estates."

9 Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan; concludes that there was a triangle of power in early modern Prague: the emperor was interested in the personal protection of Jews due to personal connections and the financial benefits of loans to the monarchy, while the burghers suffered from Jewish competition and thus resented the Jews' presence in the market.

Greenblatt, 117. "Jews in Prague had been aligned with the royal House of Habsburg as their protectors, their presence in Prague stridently opposed, at times, by burghers and by certain guilds."

10 Greenblatt, 22. "Indeed in 1541 and against in 1559, Emperor Ferdinand, bowing to pressure from burghers, ordered expulsions of the Jews from Prague. In each case, a few wealthy families were allowed to remain in the city, and neither expulsions lasted long."

Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan; concludes that these expulsions were mainly symbolic, and served as a method for the historically pro-Jewish Habsburg monarchy to appease anti-Jewish fervor.

11 Cohen and Rosman, 24.

12 Goldberg, *Crossing the Jabbok* in, 66. Jewish community leaders needed to ratified by external civil authorities, and decided all external affairs of the community. Rohden, *Meneket*, 2. Communal leaders enforced Jewish law, Halakah within the communities.

Weissler, 51. There were different sets of laws for each gender within Jewish law, among which there were different provisions.

13 Greenblatt, 53.

14 Rosman, *Poland: Early Modern (1500-1795)*

15 Fine, *Judaism in Practice,* 101.

Maria & Kazimierz Piechotka, *Wooden Synagogues,* 36. "Religious rules required separate entrances for men and women."

Fine, 112. Examines The Tashbetz (Samson ben Tzadok) on removing women from the synagogue, "….it is not appropriate to allow a beautifully dressed-up woman to be among the men and right there in the presence of God….His objection is based on the fear that sexual thoughts will cross the mind of a man who is leaning over a woman's lap to circumcise the baby whom she is holding.

Fine, 107. "On the role of women in Jewish law and society, see especially, Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person*: *The Status of women in the Mishnah*….Chapter 3 is devoted to the status of a wife in rabbinic legislation, and chapter 6 explores the exclusion of women from the public domain."

For more information on women and sexual allure in rabbinic texts, see *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and gender in Rabbinic Judaism* Chapter 11 on Medieval Rabbinism and the ritual marginalization of women.

16 Greenblatt, 31.

17 Ibid., 53.

18 Fine, 206.

19 Rohden, 1. For more information on early modern Jewish women and marriage, please see the chapter entitled "Virginity: women's body as a state of mind-destiny becomes biology" of Adelman*'s The Jewish Body* , and the chapter entitled "Mothers and children as seen by sixteenth-century rabbis in the Ottoman empire" of Landman's *Sephardi Family Life in the Early Modern Diaspora*.

women would not receive "religiously correct" instruction forced rabbinic authorities to the understanding that women's education could no longer be ignored.[20]

Although male writers' attempted to silence women who initiated their own rituals, studied traditional texts, and spoke in public,[21] women took advantage of the long tradition of female teaching of religious knowledge to undertake a leadership role in their education.[22] In 16th century Prague, many women taught Torah to other women, composed prayers for one another, and prayed together.[23] The early modern period overall featured increased social mobility with the growing participation of women and different socioeconomic classes of men in reading and writing, communal cohesion, and crises of authority in light of the messianic fervor that took over the continent, all of which affected the way women participated in the religious community.[24] The rise of messianic fervor centered on Shabbetai Zvi, an enigmatic Jewish scholar who claimed to be the Messiah and caused the Jewish world to experience the largest wave of Messianic sentiment since the rise of Christianity.[25] Women seized the opportunity amid prophetic fervor to participate in extra ritual activities: marginalized in public acts of worship, women found an influential voice in prophetic calling.[26] The movement overall created a sense of unity among Jews by presenting the need to communally address the movement, but it also threatened the community by challenging the legitimacy of rabbinic forms and authority.[27] A more direct way in which women interacted with Jewish worship and spirituality was by composing *tkhine*—special prayers written by learned Jewish women for their uneducated Jewish female readers.[28] These prayers dealt with the exclusion of women from prestigious roles in Judaism by imagining women who were more powerful and honored than they were.[29]

The rise of *tkhines* as a genre emerged from women's desire to control and increase their participation in the Jewish ritual worship, and these prayers represented one of the many sources available during this time that described women's roles in *Ashkenazi* Jewish society.[30] *Tkhines*, which come from the Hebrew word meaning 'to supplicate,' are recited in private by Jewish women in central and Eastern Europe.[31] These prayers provided evidence for their lives by offering information on what they were thinking as they performed religious duties and household tasks.[32] Because these prayers were written in the vernacular, Yiddish, they would be readily comprehensible to women who were rarely taught more than the bare fundamentals of Hebrew, and sometimes completely illiterate.[33] Most girls studied to master phonetic Hebrew reading that could easily be adapted to the reading of Yiddish texts written in Hebrew letters.[34] Unlike Jewish liturgy that was fixed, regulated, and written in the sacred scholarly language of Hebrew, *Tkhines* were inherently amenable, and allowed for modifications over time as women incorporated their own spiritual experience.[35] *Tkhines* also further elaborated on women's capabilities by developing the image of women who could be 'like men' through the use of parallels between women's rituals in the home and those of rabbis in the synagogue. The comparison was remarkable: despite the obvious separation of masculine and feminine spheres, their rituals were parallel.[36] For example, the *tkhine* for candle lighting in *The Three Gates* prayer book, attributed to Sarah bas Tovim, compared the actions of a high priest and that of a woman lighting Shabbat candles. As Chava Weissler noted, the prayer placed women squarely in the central priestly role, "…may my [observance of the] commandment of kindling the lights be accepted as the act of the High Priest when he kindled the lights in the dear Temple was accepted"[37] Other sources that offered insight into Jewish women's lives included Yiddish books, anthologies, archival sources, traditional rabbinic literature, and collections of *tkhines*.[38] Women's devotional literature presented both well-known and obscure biblical women to provide images of role models of women living religious lives.[39]

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20 Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs,* 5.
Cohen & Rosman, 105.
Rosman, "Poland: Early Modern (1500-1795)."
21 Fine, 52.
22 Rohden, 8. Rohden discusses the tradition of female teaching of religious knowledge. For example, several decades after Rivkah wrote, Hannah bat Judah Leib composed a sermon on her experience as a teacher and preacher to women. However, this tradition extended as far back as the Middle Ages, particularly in northern Italy where there was evidence of women writing sermons and elegies.
23 Ibid.
24 Cohen & Rosman, 102. Social mobility of society and communal cohesion. Greenblatt, 7. Growing participation of women and different socioeconomic classes of men in reading and writing.
Cohen & Rosman, 106. Crises of authority.
25 Fine, 470.
26 Weissler, 12.
Fine, 473. Women took advantage of prophetic fervor to attain a greater voice in the community.
27 Cohen & Rosman, 108.
28 Rohden, 2.
29 Rosman.

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30 Weissler, 12.
31 The word "to supplicate" in Hebrew is וָנֲחֱתְּהֵל, and phonetically, le-hithanen.
32 Rohden, ix.
33 Fine, 62.
34 Rosman.
35 Ibid.
36 Weissler, 59.
37 Ibid., 60.
38 Moshe Rosman in his article entitled "Poland: Early Modern (1500-1795) listed various sources into Jewish women's lives, including: Yiddish books such as *Shmuel Bujh* and *Ze'enah u-Re-enah* that instructed women in the observance of commandments; morality anthologies and behavior manuals like *Meneket Rivkah* and *Brantspiegel*; *Tkhine* collections such as those written by Leah Dreyzl bas Moses, Rachel Leah Horowitz; and many others, and traditional rabbinic literature such as *The Memoirs of Ber of Bolechow* and Rabbi Moses Isserles' *Shulhan Arukh* (code of Jewish law).
39 Weissler, 7. According to Chava Weissler, Tkhines incorporated both folk customs and heroes, which included practices not mandated by Jewish law, and popular biblical matriarchs such

Rivkah bat Meir, drawing upon the popularity of Yiddish ethical works, wrote "Meneket Rivkah" with the same sentiment as Jewish women wrote *tkhines.* The work belongs to the genre of ethical literature written in Yiddish, which was popular among women in the 16th and 17th centuries.[40] It was both a prescriptive and descriptive document, enumerating how a woman should act in the domestic and social spheres, with each chapter providing a unique understanding of a different aspect of a woman's' sphere of conduct.[41] It is also a didactic document, using stories, warnings, and metaphors to instruct women in household matters, specifically on how to raise children. Without explicitly advocating for women's education, in fact practically neglecting the subject entirely, Rivkah bat Meir in her manual allows the reader to presume what knowledge she believes women should have. By walking her audience through the thinking process involved in understanding the rabbinical texts she cites, she teaches women how to read analytically, and her references to these religious and moral texts without explanation implies she believes women should already have engaged with them as she has. Most importantly, Rivkah's own intellectual prowess, evident in her translations from Hebrew to Yiddish and her ability to engage with various religious texts including the *midrash*—ancient commentary on Hebrew scripture—served as an example to her audience.

Rivkah was evidently a role model for Jewish women's education in her day and age, and she provided unusual insight into the daily lives of early modern Jewish women.[42] Her father was the teacher and master rabbi Meir Tikotin, and her upbringing in a scholarly family allowed her to study Hebrew and the Torah as a child, and possibly the basics of rabbinic literature as well.[43] Her formal title of *ha-rabbanit* denoted her as a female rabbi or teacher, and she also held the functional title of *ha-darshanit*, female interpreter.[44] In her writing, Rivkah bat Meir explained her desire to transmit her knowledge to others, stating that she was writing this manual out of "moral obligation to pass along her knowledge about the correct implementation of the commandments."[45] Her use of equivocal phrases and diction such as "perhaps," represented a mixture of modesty and self-confidence necessary to balance her unprecedented intellectual ability with the stereotypical characteristics of a pious woman.[46] Even the printer of her manual wondered at her skill, asking, "Has it ever happened in countless years, that a woman has written something of her own accord? I let it, therefore, be printed.... It shows that a woman can also compose words of ethical instruction and good biblical interpretations as well as many men."[47] Chapter Five, devoted to a discussion on childrearing, stands as a testament to her skill in remaining within the confines of communal values. While her content remained traditional, demurring to the male-dominated hierarchical structure, her form reveals a very different perspective on women by elevating the status of their duties and implicitly emphasizing the importance of girls' education in the context of the home.

Rivkah bat Meir's greatest achievement was her ability to write such a document without compromising her community's social norms, an incredible feat for a woman of her time. She avoided obvious displays of knowledge and taught without explicitly stating whether the interpretations she listed were her own by using carefully crafted phrases such as, "this is to be understood as follows...."[48] This method provided her with the freedom to state her own interpretations, or those of others she agreed with, without repercussion. Retaining her modesty was integral to maintaining her reputation, which explains why she adhered to the conventional standards for pious women of her time by refusing to presume to be all knowing in her understanding of biblical and rabbinical verses. For example, she ended a passage that deliberated on the meaning of the word "pain" with the statement, "But we do not want to talk of this—'One does not question God's judgments,' we cannot understand it (anyway)."[49] She also subscribed to the traditional positions to which women were relegated by advocating that women should not aim to participate in ceremonies from which they were historically excluded, such as a sons' circumcision, and to not venture beyond home more than necessary.[50] Stressing the importance of woman's duties to her household over those of worship, she also stated, "It is better for her [the Jewish mother] to stay at home and think of synagogue [than] to go to synagogue and think of home."[51] Rivkah not only adhered to the traditional narrative of the woman's role in the household, but also encouraged the system whereby girls' main purpose in life was marriage. She stated that a mother's duty was to encourage her son to study in order to be "given the daughter of a Torah scholar with a lot of money..."[52] because at this time, having connections to an educated family increased a family's social power.

In addition to prescribing the traditionally restricted roles Jewish women were demoted to, Rivkah bat Meir also altered the status of these roles by emphasizing the Jewish woman's importance to the family--the basis of the communal structure. She opened the chapter with a description of how the Jewish mother functions as the representative of morality at home, serving as the moral compass of the entire household. Everything at home revolved around her example, whereby her success, in instilling Jewish morals to her hus-

as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. These women were figures with whom the female readers could identify with.

40 Schiller*, Women! Yiddish!*

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Rohden, 4-5.

44 Ibid.

45 Rohden, 11.

46 Ibid. Rivkah in the introduction she wrote for her own manual said, "whoever should pay attention to my words, perhaps I will gain some merit from them," As Rohden noted in the introduction, this method represented Rivkah's characteristic mixture of modesty and self-confidence. Rivkah in her manual repeatedly alternated between decisive statements using "this means" or "you should do this," and hesitant statements such as "I could...explain the verse as follows," or "I should ask another question."

47 Ibid, 80.

48 Ibid., 151.

49 Ibid., 152.

50 Ibid., 160.

51 Ibid., 159.

52 Ibid., 173.

band and children, would bring her great honor.[53] Although this important position would grant woman power at home, it might also attribute to her all responsibilities for any immoral action committed within the household. The failure to correctly instill the community's morals reflected on the woman, and on the woman alone. Rivkah's warning of the consequences of failing to fulfill one's womanly duties ensured women to undertake their tasks seriously, and this didactic method recurred throughout the chapter. Another essential task for women was caring for their children without outside help. This independence, along with Rivkah's emphasis on the importance of such sacrifices women made for their family in their duties such as enduring the pain of nursing the child, represented the respect Rivkah had for women's household duties. Yet, once again, she warned that the consequence of failing to do so would be dire, "she squanders (her reputation)" and will thus "suffer from this her whole life."[54] Rivkah further emphasizes that women must also take their didactic role seriously, an opinion which she explains through the use of the metaphor of a board, "When one speaks with a child about inconsequential things, it is like when one has a board, and wants to write on it something useful. Along comes someone else and fouls the board so that he cannot write on it."[55] Evidently what a woman says or does has a great effect on the child, and to further emphasize a woman's didactic importance, she discusses the "[wisdom] and righteousness"[56] necessary for women to properly educate their children. In saying so, she subtly elevated the importance of her manual because of its own didactic intentions.

The subtlety of Rivkah's writing style makes it difficult for the reader to discern where exactly her intentions lay, particularly on women's' education. While referencing these texts is not the same as explicitly advocating for women's education, her assumption that her audience, young Jewish women, could understand her references and follow her arguments implied she thought they should have basic knowledge of rabbinical texts. She often brought forth a topic without introducing it on the premise that women would be familiar with her discussion of the Yiddish literature, as she did when she advised women on how to educate their sons, "one should tell him about Chenaniah, Mishael, and Azariah…."[57] She also translated these documents into Yiddish, increasing their accessibility to women who typically did not understand Hebrew. Furthermore, she avoided using gender specific denominations when describing how women should educate their children, which "may imply that the request also include[ed] girls."[58] She solely mentioned that the education she previously described was for boys at the end of the chapter, and then proceeded to devote minimal attention to girls' education, which seems odd given the obvious respect she has for her own education. Also, given her educational background, she would understand that the religious education received by most Jewish males was the primary means of achieving power and prestige. Therefore, her expectation that women should have at least a minimal intellectual foundation within the sphere of the home has shocking implications.

Rivkah expressed her support of women's education in the domestic sphere by example of her own education, and by the way she teaches girls how to think critically. She showed her extensive knowledge of the *midrash* by repeatedly referencing differing interpretations of the same passages, and determining which one she deemed most accurate. She then demonstrated to her audience how she accomplished this by providing her train of thought in interpreting and making sense of the text. One example was her explanation of the biblical verse regarding Deborah the Prophetess, "the stars fought from heaven."[59] After providing the quotation without explanation, she then anticipated her audience's initial response to it by asking, "how did the stars fight?"[60] Given that Rivkah bat Meir is a learnt woman, it would have been unlikely that she should interpret this passage literally, but she understood that this is how a less educated woman would see it. Her attempt to portray her audience's perception reveals her understanding of what constituted girls' education at the time. Her next step was to provide the logical progression of her ideas: how the stars served as a metaphor for the Jews' "forebears" who fought their enemies to bring benefits to the Jews, and these benefits shone like stars.[61] Her example taught them how to read analytically, a skill that women at the time would neither normally learn, nor be encouraged to do so. Another didactic method Rivkah employed was her repeated use of "we" in her explanations of passages, a tactic aimed to create solidarity with her audience and to add to her reputation as a role model.[62] "Meneket Rivkah" also exposed women to the kind of writings most of them would never have encountered, and even if they had, would not have been able to understand due to linguistic and intellectual boundaries. She further encouraged women to be confident in their importance, "but for a woman who is upright and smart, thinks of the goal of it all, and puts all her efforts into…. one never knows what the future holds."[63]

Rivkah bat Meir's vast knowledge of rabbinical ideas, remarkable enough of its own accord, along with her ability to communicate them effectively to a less educated audience, is quite astounding. What makes her even more remarkable was that despite her audacity in writing such a document, she continued to command the respect and approval of male figures in the authority. Traditional in content yet subversive in form, her manual exemplifies how women were capable of subscribing to female stereotypes while simultaneously deviating from them by creating their own means of worship at home. Most importantly, Rivkah bat Meir epitomized women's abilities to alter male-dominated societal practices by using the inferior position to their advantage. This insight is in stark contrast to the dominant view that 16th century Jewish women played solely passive roles in the Jewish community.

53 Ibid., 150.
54 Ibid., 155.
55 Ibid., 162.
56 Ibid., 169.
57 Ibid., 163.
58 Ibid., 164.

59 Ibid., 177.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Schiller.
63 Rohden, 155.